

ABSTRACT

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING INTRAGROUP CHURCH CONFLICT THROUGH LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBERIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by

George Klay Weagba

Intragroup church conflict developed in the Liberia Annual Conference (LAC) of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in the 1980s. Therefore, this study sought to find out the causes of the conflict and recommend strategies for resolving group conflict within the conference.

The research used criterion-based sampling. Ten ordained elders from the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church were selected as participants. These participants completed a researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions.

The questions sought to discover the root causes of the bishop-for-life conflict as the first major intragroup church conflict in the LAC/UMC.

The study demonstrated that the intragroup church conflict erupted the peace of the conference. Subsequently, the incumbent bishop understood the passing of the life tenure vote as a conflict resolution model. Also, the church has no effective ways of dealing with intragroup church conflict and may not be able to resolve conflict. The post-colonial African chieftaincy practice has been responsible for the way in which conflict has been handled.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING INTRAGROUP CHURCH
CONFLICT THROUGH LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBERIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

presented by

George Klay Weagba

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Mentor

May 12, 2009

Date

Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program

May 12, 2009

Date

Executive Director; Internal Reader

May 12, 2009

Date

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING INTRAGROUP CHURCH
CONFLICT THROUGH LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBERIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

George Klay Weagba

May 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all those who, one way or the other, contributed meaningfully to the successful completion of my dissertation.

Special thanks go to those who participated in the interview, for their cooperation and contribution towards the process.

Thank you to Janice Huber (ATS Library) for providing some of the materials used in the writing process and also to Drs. David and Ruth Rambo, Dr. Randy Jessen, Rebecca Barnes, Judy Seitz, Sheryl Voigts, and all of the wonderful people at the Beeson Center for their support, guidance, and encouragement during my studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

I have a special sense of deep gratitude and indebtedness to my wife, Rev. Lydia Manawu-Weagba, for her love, endurance, support and care; my daughter, Georgina Teetee Weagba, for her patience in allowing me to do my work to the end; my spiritual parents, Drs. Delbert and Sue Rose, for their numerous words of advice, encouragement, prayers and support; my nephews, Leo and Isaac, who helped me with the typing and driving respectively; my sisters, Aunties Tete, Fakateh, and Wortor for their encouragement; my niece, Julian, my church member, Mrs. Victoria Dioh Kpoh, and my spiritual daughter, Evelyn E. Moulton, for their concern, love, and encouragement.

My deepest gratitude goes to members of my research reflection team, especially the following persons: Rev. Dr. J. Sarwolo Nelson, Jr., for his suggestions during discussion; Rev. Blidi Nimley, for helping me during the interview process; and, Mrs.

Vivian R. J. Ndikumana, whose wisdom, articulation, and invaluable assistance have brought the work to completion.

Finally, I have a sense of deep gratitude to my mentor Dr. Michael Rynkiewicz for the time spent with me in writing this dissertation and for his valuable suggestions and contributions. I give special thanks to my team members, Dr. Thomas F. Tumblin and Dr. Stacy Minger, for their tireless effort, input, and patience towards the writing and completion of my dissertation, and lastly, to the King of kings and Lord of lords who has given me life and the strength to carry on.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memories of my late grandmother, Rev. Gbateh Fakateh, and my mother, Mrs. Esther Teetee Brown Weagba, whose love, care, patience, and nurture in the Christian faith have brought me thus far. To God be the glory; great things He has done.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. AFL: Armed Forces of Liberia
2. ECOMOG: ECOWAS Monitoring Group
3. ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States
4. GEMAP: Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme
5. LAC/UMC: Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church
6. LISIS: Liberia Statistics and Geo-Information Services
7. LURD: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
8. NPFL: National Patriotic Front of Liberia
9. PRC: People's Redemption Council
10. RUF: Revolutionary United Front
11. SLAC: Sierra Leone Annual Conference
12. TWP: True Whig Party
13. ULIMO: United Liberation Movement
14. UNMIL: United Nations Mission in Liberia
15. WACC: West Africa Central Conference

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

The Bible and the history of the Church attest to the reality of church conflict. In the Bible, particularly the New Testament, the early Church experienced many illustrations of internal conflicts. Leslie B. Flynn lists several of them:

The Greeks versus the Hebrews (Acts 6:1-6),
Peter versus the Judiazers (Acts 11:2, 3),
Paul versus Peter (Gal. 2:11-14),
Paul versus Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40),
The Corinthian Church versus itself (I Cor.1:11, 12; 6:1-11; 11:18-23),
Euodia versus Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), and
Diotrephes versus the Church (3 John 9, 10). (9)

Clearly, conflict is not new to the Church. Dissension has been an age-old problem.

Intragroup church conflict is one of the categories of disputes found in a local assembly; others are intrapersonal, interpersonal, or intergroup. This conflict usually transpires between two persons and/or in a group setting (McCullough 78). An intragroup dispute involves people with personal conflict dynamics (78). That is, intragroup contention is segmentary opposition. The structure comes into play when a dispute emerges. The dispute starts between two persons in a group and then followers of the two persons emerged (Patterson 83). People do not have to ask, “Which side should I be on?”

However, this attitude should not be seen as a license for strife, but as a perspective from which to view the process of reconciliation at work in the church. For the Bible says “[A] house divided against itself will not stand” (Matt.12:25, KJV).

Between 2005 and 2007, intragroup church conflict developed in the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church between the bishop of the Liberia Annual Conference and officials of three districts of the conference because the bishop

transferred some churches from their districts to other districts. This issue, the transferring of churches, has created a deepening rift within the conference. As a result, the witness and well-being of the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is at stake.

Someone has wisely said that evil wins when good people do nothing. Because the conflict between the bishop and these leaders has not been resolved, I do not intend to deal with it. I will, however, study one of the major disagreements that occurred in the life of the Liberia Annual Conference between 1980 and 1989. This past contention parallels the recent strife.

The controversy over the life tenure of the Episcopal office was a major conflict that interrupted the normal function of one of the annual sessions of the Liberia Annual Conference. This dispute came into a full-blown debate at the 155th session of the conference held at the Jasper S. Grant United Methodist Church in Pleebo City, Maryland County, Liberia, in 1988 with the then Bishop, Rev. Dr. Arthur F. Kulah and supporters on one side, while Joseph S. Bush, the Conference Lay Leader, and his supporters comprised the other side. When people take sides in a discord, the chances for the increase of the conflict is greater and, when people are denied the opportunity to fully comprehend what is happening in a group setting, conflict may develop over issues. Prior to the 1988 annual session of the conference, the issue of *life-time* bishop had not raised enough concern for formal dissension.

The issue of the life tenure of the Episcopal office in the United Methodist Church of Liberia goes as far back as the 1960s when the church in Liberia was granted the authority to create a central conference in order to elect its own bishop (Official Journal

of the LAC/UMC 36). Prior to the 1980s, the LAC/UMC, which was then Liberia Central Conference had a term tenure episcopal (eight years). Delegates voted for a bishop for four years, and then the conference would hold a new election for a bishop, with the current bishop having the opportunity for reelection for another four years before stepping down for a new leader. When the LAC became the Liberia Central Conference in the 60s, *life-time* episcopacy was proposed under the leadership of the first indigenous bishop of the LAC, Bishop Stephen Trowen Nagbe. This issue, the *life-time episcopacy*, experienced opposition and was reversed between 1965 and 1980. Hence, term episcopacy which was an eight-year term, was practiced between 1965 and 1980. However, in 1980 the general conference granted an enabling Act to create a West Africa Central Conference consisting of Liberia and Sierra Leone at the time, and later Nigeria joined and now it includes the Ivory Coast. This act, combined with the organizing of the West Africa Central Conference in 1981, allowed for *life-episcopacy*, requiring retirement at the age of sixty-five to seventy years to replace *term episcopacy* in the Liberia Annual Conference.

Under the West Africa Central Conference, the tenures of office for the bishop were term episcopacy and life episcopacy. The Liberia Annual Conference elected its bishop for an eight year term of office, while the Sierra Leone Annual Conference elected its bishop for life. Because the two annual conferences operated under the same system, the Council of Bishops authorized the two conferences to create a uniform system of tenure for their bishops (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 37). Two committees were appointed by the Liberia Annual Conference to research the term and life tenures. These committees were chaired by two clerics of the United Methodist Church, Rev. J. Nimeju

Kartwe and Rev. Henry Khan, for the term tenure and life tenure respectively.

Apparently, after much deliberation on the life tenure and term tenure, discussions were concluded on the two by a formal vote in favor of *life-time episcopacy* during the 153rd annual session in 1983. Thus, the Liberia Annual Conference officially arrived at the decision to adopt *life-time episcopacy*. This decision was subsequently recommended to the West Africa Central Conference for its approval that bishop serving in the West Africa Central Conference serve for life. The West Africa Central Conference then reached a unanimous decision in favor of *life-time episcopacy* for the Liberia Annual Conference and the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. During this period, the Rev. Dr. Arthur F. Kulah of the Liberia Annual Conference, along with his Sierra Leone counterpart, were elected for life in 1984 (37-38).

From 1983 to January 1988, nothing was heard about the life-term issue. In February 1988, the lay leader of the Liberia Annual Conference, Joseph Sebastian Bush, raised the issue of *life-time episcopacy*. This concern was the genesis of the discord over the *life-tenure of the bishop* in the 80s. When the WACC passed the decision to allow the LAC and the SLAC practice life tenure, argument arose between the bishop and the conference lay leader as to the implementation of the decision. The strife over *life-time episcopacy* led to party spirit and division in the Liberia Annual Conference. The bishop, his cabinet, and other sympathizers in the conference supported life-tenure while the conference lay leader, Joseph S. Bush, along with James. H. Bush, Winston D. Richards, Ben T. Elliot, and their sympathizers, opposed life-tenure. These people were the key players in the conflict.

For the first time in the conference, a group of Methodists referred to themselves as concerned Methodists to oppose the then bishop as bishop for life. Letters of petition were written to the West Africa Central Conference, the Council of Bishops, and the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church, by the concerned Methodists, against the bishop for his removal from office. These petitions, however, were dismissed on the grounds that the bishop for life election was in order. Similarly, a letter of complaint was written to the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Liberia by the concerned Methodists to issue writ of Quo-Warranto on the bishop to prevent him from presiding over the annual session of the 1988 conference. This action, however, also never took place. The bishop, in response to the situation, accused Joseph S. Bush and his associates of insulting, abusing, and attacking him. The Bishop filed an official complaint against Bush with the Conference Committee on Investigation. In the process, Bush was removed from the office of Lay Leader for the Annual Conference upon recommendation of the bishop and his cabinet.

The bishop for life controversy produced interesting happenings in the annual conference among United Methodists. Disputants made claims and counterclaims. The party of the bishop accused Bush and his group of publishing embarrassing articles in the national dailies, and for his appearance on radio and television. Furthermore, disputants sounded counterclaims of witch hunting and blacklisting, as well as false accusation. Other members of the conference claimed they were being misrepresented by their colleagues. That is, their colleagues implicated them as concerned Methodists because of their association with members of the group. Likewise, the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry did not approve some ministers at the annual session because they

were accused of being participants of the concerned Methodists group. People made allegations that those who were loyal to the bishop persecuted persons who raised the questions about *life-time episcopacy*. Some members of the conference expressed dissatisfaction over the procedure that ushered in the bishop for life. Accordingly, barrenness and disunity became visible in the conference as these things happened.

Discord poses a threat to the church's unity and effective ministry that honors God. When contention occurs in the church, especially destructive conflict, it brings regrettable consequences of grudges among members as well as division within (McCullough 33). The heart of the discord in the conference was the interruption of the 155th session of the Liberia Annual Conference in 1988 that led to its failure to exhaust one-half of its approved agenda. In addition, the disturbance that erupted at the formal opening session of the 1989 conference was also problematic.

Even though the bishop for life argument is in the past and may have been amicably resolved, the need for practical and relevant strategies for resolving intragroup church conflict in the Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church still exists. Thus, this study is relevant. I want to clarify that I am not raising the life tenure issue again but looking at this case from the past in order to provide some models and suggestions for the future. The current split in the conference calls for finding redemptive ways to resolve or manage the dissension. If leaders are to handle or deal successfully with conflict situations, they must have a fair understanding of the psychological, sociological, physical, political, traditional, and religious backgrounds that are so critical to strife (Patterson 81). The Methodist Church in Liberia has played, and continues to play, a vital and meaningful role in the life of the country, making enormous

contributions to the development and progress of the Republic of Liberia. Hence, the church has great influence on the country and its people. If the church is broken and shattered, however, its witness cannot be effective. Moreover, ongoing and unresolved conflict represents one of the church's greatest internal threats.

The Liberia Annual Conference needs to know that every contention has a process of handling it. Kenneth C. Haugk identifies five levels of church dissension. He calls the first level of conflict "problems to solve" (23). The problems to solve provide for open communication without hidden agenda, taking the focus off the disputing parties. Identifying the problem and collaborating efforts are the focus of this level. Haugk labels the second level of conflict as "disagreements" (23). "Other person-focused" instead of "issue-focused" is the center of this level. The disputants employ self-protection and generalizations. They debate over who is right and who is wrong. The third level is called "contest" (23). The win-lose approach is the core of this level. The disputing parties avoid collaboration because their goal is not on solving the problem but on counteraction. The contenders want self-interest to prevail. This level of contest is difficult to control because disputants communicate less to each other and more about each other with sympathizers.

A serious power struggles occurs at the fourth level. Haugk entitles it "fight-fight" (23). Contenders now see themselves as adversaries and antagonists. They make the original issues and the context of the problem a minor one. The disputing parties now identify the problems as a person. He/she is the problem or they are the problem. They put into play an "us against them" mentality, and emotion adversely affects their ability to think objectively. Selective perception confirms and fuels negative stereotyping.

Disputing parties avoid each other and assume the worst of the other. Being right and punishing those who are accused of being wrong becomes the goal. The choice to win or leave is made visible.

Finally, Haugk names the fifth level “intractable situations” (23). At this level, the antagonists seek to destroy their adversaries at all cost, no matter how it hurts them or ruins the church. Commenting on these five levels of church conflict, Jerry L. Schmalenberger writes, “The first three can be successfully addressed, and peace can be restored; not so for the last two” (39).

Conflict is inevitable and can be negative and dangerous when it produces disunity, war, quarrels, and oppositions, but it can be positive when it produces unity, peace, togetherness, change, and growth. Therefore, leaders in the Liberia Annual Conference should understand and creatively address the root causes of contention in the church.

The Purpose

The purpose of this research was to identify and learn the causes of intragroup church conflict within the LAC/UMC over the life tenure episcopal conflict that occurred in the 1980s and thereby identify strategies that could be used to address current conflicts and conflicts that might arise in the future.

Research Questions

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, I have identified four research questions:

1. What were the causes of the past major conflict in the LAC/UMC?
2. How did this conflict develop over time?

3. What strategies did people use to increase or decrease conflict?
4. What strategies were available to resolve the conflict, whether biblical, cultural, or global in origin?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are key to understanding the study.

Conflict Resolution

Different options avail themselves for our use when dissension happens. One of those options, conflict resolution, should be the objective in every conflict situation. For the purpose of this study, I have defined conflict resolution as a win-win solution to a discord that has dealt with the root cause of the problem, produced normalcy, dislodged the recurrence of the strife, been gradual in nature, and been free from unproductive means. This definition explains how conflict resolution can be effective when it separates people from the problem; that is, the problem is not identified as a person and conflict resolution can be ineffective when it focuses on people rather than the problem.

Keith Huttenlocker calls effective attempts at conflict resolution, “creative conflict resolution” and ineffective attempts at conflict resolution, “malignant conflict resolution” (33-34). He describes creative conflict resolution in this way:

Creative conflict resolution is like a genesis. It produces a new beginning. Out of the mists of confusion is made a vital form with a bright future. Creative conflict resolution focuses on the problem. It seeks to understand the perspective of one’s opponents and to empathize with their distress. It seeks negotiation rather than preconceived solutions. It seeks preservation of the fellowship rather than self-defense. It seeks reconciliation rather than oppression. It accepts complicity in the problem and seeks partnership in overcoming it. It is characterized by objectivity, charity, trust, honesty, amenability and openness. (34-35)

Creative conflict resolution is an ideal resolution that produces healing for all disputing parties, unlike malignant conflict resolution. Huttenlocker holds the following opinion:

Malignant attempts at conflict resolution invariably focus on the problem makers (as they are so accused) rather than the problem. These attempts seem to bring the opposing faction into voluntary compliance or, failing that, involuntary submission. If either is unachieved, malignant attempts for resolution then usually press for expulsion. When any of these is accomplished, the conflict is said to be resolved. It has, however, been resolved at the price of the devastation of the body. Chances are that problems yet undealt with will resurface at a later time and stir another conflict. Malignant conflict resolution comes unilaterally (independently of the other faction), seeks to absolve one's own side from all faults, and moves irresistibly toward a win-lose conclusion. It is characterized by mistrust and manipulation. The atmosphere is full of threat, partly because of the rhetoric and partly because of secretive strategies. (33-34)

I concur with Huttenlocker's description of malignant attempts at conflict resolution. Any conflict resolution that is manipulative will explode very soon, and the explosion can be dangerous.

Subsequently, Richard Patterson identifies three types of conflict resolutions that provide options for Christian leaders (86): win-lose, win-win, and lose-lose. The win-lose analysis is one in which either the majority, minority, or leader wins. This outcome is commonly called the zero-sum game because all-or-nothing is left over in the conflict situation, or warfare (McCullough 53). Charles R. McCullough says, '[E]very loss of one side is a gain for the other side and every gain for one side is a loss for the other' (52). The win-lose settlement is more appropriate if it redemptively serves as a group goal as opposed to a personal goal (Patterson 86).

The opposite of the win-lose or zero-sum analysis is the win-win or negotiated proposition. In the win-win outcome, everyone in the group or conflict wins. This

solution allows synergizing, or problem solving, to provide the context in which the contention is solved (Patterson 87).

The win-lose proposition encourages the contenders to see the conflict as a battle to be won by one faction or the other; thus, defensiveness and counter attacks result. In comparison, the win-win scenario is a more constructive resolution to a conflict situation because it avoids counter attack, allows the two sides of a dispute to shoulder some responsibility and blame, and enables them to be reconciled in their relationships.

The third option for church conflict resolution is the lose-lose settlement. Patterson defines this settlement as one that “allows for compromise, neutral third party arbitration, or side-payments to gain acceptance” (86). In the lose-lose outcome, everyone loses something and the loss is less than what is gained (86). Additionally, the lose-lose analysis enables a neutral party to help the disputants—who fail to see reality because they are entangled in their views or positions—reach a compromise or an agreement. The neutral party may give side-payments (i.e., promises of support, cooperation, or commitment) to one or both participants so group goals can be achieved. Whatever solutions are used to resolve conflict, disputants should apply, or consider, redemptive measures for a Christian outcome.

Strategies

Strategies are the means or ways of approaching a problem or achieving a goal (Kirkpatrick 408). These strategies should be biblical, efficient, and relevant in nature.

Leadership

Leadership is the action of influencing individuals, or groups of people, and managing specific tasks and structures in order to achieve goals and fulfill a vision shared by leader and followers.

Liberia Annual Conference

The Liberia Annual Conference is the Episcopal, or geographical, area of the United Methodist Church in Liberia.

Intragroup Conflict

Intragroup conflict is a conflict that takes place within a group. This discord is much more complex because many more perspectives— even pertaining to one side— must be reconciled (McCullough 133). McCullough notes, “[I]n intragroup conflict, two or more people in the group may fight it out, but others are involved, either in the results or as mediators or both” (78). One of the complexities of intragroup conflict is the perspective from which it is approached. The disputants in this conflict context see the conflict as a battle to be won, hence this conflict begins as a zero sum or win-lose between the contending factions in the group (133). McCullough believes that when intragroup disagreement develops, fear and hopelessness persist among the disputants (134), but at the same time, the disputants are brave and hopeful that this conflict will end the history of discord.

Context of the Study

The context of this research was the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. For a better understanding of this context, this chapter presents a brief background of the Republic of Liberia, the location of the Liberia Annual Conference.

The Republic of Liberia

Liberia, the oldest independent nation in Africa, is on the west coast of Africa. Liberia is bordered on the west by the Republic of Sierra Leone, on the east by the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, to the north by the Republic of Guinea, and to the south by the Atlantic Ocean. The country attained its independence on 26 July 1847, and has a land area of approximately 43,000 square miles. Its population in 2008 was estimated at 3.5 million (*Liberia Statistics* 65).

The capital city of Liberia is Monrovia, named after the late President James Monroe of the United States of America. The official language is English, but the country also has sixteen major indigenous languages. The monetary unit of the country is the Liberian dollar (L\$). Rice is the main staple. The country is divided into three geographic regions: the coastal plain, which contains most of the population and is low and swampy; the central plateau, crossed by numerous valleys and covered by dense tropical forests; and, the mountainous inland areas. Subsequently, Liberia is divided into fifteen political subdivisions. These subdivisions are called counties and are governed by superintendents, who are appointed by the president with the approval of the Liberian Senate (World Guide 3-5).

The people of Liberia are divided into two major groups: the indigenous Liberians, known as the natives, and the Americo-Liberians, descendants of freed slaves

from the United States of America. The majority of Liberians profess traditional African religion, followed by Christianity and Islam respectively.

Liberia has recovered from a brutal civil war that spanned fourteen years of the nation's history. This country was founded by freed American slaves with a constitution modeled after that of the United States of America. An American ally for most of the twentieth century, it became the first republic, from 1847 to 1980, under one-party rule, the True Whig Party (TWP), which ruled Liberia for the majority of this period. Joseph Jenkins Roberts became the first president of this republic, which was dominated by Americo-Liberian elites. These settlers controlled the socioeconomic, political, educational, and religious life of the country. The settlers, although in the minority and upper class, controlled 95 percent of the country's resources while the indigenous Liberians who are in the majority and the lower class, controlled the remaining 5 percent of the resources (Guannu 20-25).

The oppressive class system led to the first military coup in 1980. On 12 April 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, an indigenous Liberian, took power in a military *coup d'état*, executing President William R. Tolbert, Jr., the nineteenth president and the last of the first republic. He was executed for alleged rampant corruption and injustices inflicted upon the indigenous people. Doe's new government suspended the constitution and formed the People's Redemption Council (PRC), gaining full power (World Guide 3-4).

Supported by financial aid from the United States, Doe increasingly promoted his ethnic group to positions of military and political authority, hence introducing or exacerbating the dimension of tribalism, or ethnicity, to the Liberian conflict. In 1985,

Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia won the general and presidential elections which were marked by serious flaws. On 12 November 1985, General Thomas Quiwonkpa returned home and invaded Liberia, but this invasion failed. Quiwonkpa, an indigenous Liberian and one of the enlisted men of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), had previously helped Doe overthrow the government of Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr. He fled Liberia before 1985 because Doe and he had policy differences. General Quiwonkpa was from another ethnic group. The invasion by Quiwonkpa increased Doe's brutal rule. On 24 December 1989, Doe was challenged by another invasion of Liberia that brought his fall and execution. This time, the invasion was led by a Libyan-trained Liberian, Charles G. Taylor. Taylor, an escapee from a United States prison, was backed by the Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso in his rebellion against the Liberian Government (Kulah 18-25).

The invasion by Charles G. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group sparked Liberia's long years of civil war. This war brought the destruction of lives, property, and infrastructure, resulting in the untold suffering of Liberians with millions displaced internally, and thousands externally. Taylor's fighting force was comprised of dissidents from some African countries. For humanitarian and political reasons, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responded to Taylor's invasion by setting up a monitoring observer group (ECOMOG), a peacekeeping force with direct backing from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Senegal and Mali. With a rear base in Sierra Leone, ECOMOG deployed to Liberia's capital, Monrovia, in August 1990, denying Taylor victory, though a breakaway group from the NPFL succeeded in capturing and killing Doe in September 1990.

Taylor vowed to widen the war, so in March 1991, his backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone and Guinea responded by organizing Liberian refugees, mostly former Krahn soldiers, ethnic group, from President Doe's army, into the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). In July 1997, in an election distorted by the threat that he would resume fighting if he was not elected, Taylor was elected Liberia's President (UMC-Liberia History 4).

President Taylor did not keep his promises to reduce support to the RUF. In May 1997, the Sierra Leonean President, Tejan Kabbah, was overthrown in a *coup d'état* and the RUF was invited into the new military regime. Kabbah's supporters, Kamajor "hunter" militias, fled to Liberian territory controlled by anti-Taylor ULIMO fighters, entering into alliance with them. In an attempt to prevent RUF from taking over Sierra Leone, ECOWAS deployed ECOMOG in Freetown in 1998, and by mid-1998 had extended control of Sierra Leonean territory to the Liberian border. A successful RUF counterattack in 1999 left them in control of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone and the country's significant mineral resources, principally diamonds.

Subsequently, anti-Taylor groups formed a loose alliance, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), led by Sekou Conneh and supported by Guinea, and invaded Liberia in July 2000. Similarly, the RUF, still loyal to Taylor, and Guinean dissidents carried out a counterattack on Guinea from Liberia and Sierra Leone. This attack had initial success; however, by January 2001, anti-Taylor forces pushed Taylor's forces back inside Sierra Leone and Liberia (UMC-Liberia History).

In March 2003, a new wave of fighting began after a relative calm. ECOWAS-based peace talks between rebel groups and the government opened on 4 June 2003, and,

on the same day, President Taylor was indicted for war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. In the face of mounting pressure from the United States, and the LURD offensive on Monrovia, President Taylor was forced into exile in Nigeria on 11 August 2003. ECOWAS deployed Nigerian troops to Monrovia with United States troops assisting offshore. Warring factions then signed a comprehensive peace agreement on 18 August 2003, which opened the way for a National Transitional Government with Mr. Gyude Bryant elected chairman (“History”).

In September 2003, the United Nations Security Council authorized a mixed United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to replace ECOWAS forces. Disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants remained a challenge for the transitional government. Donors increased aid to Liberia after imposing strict external controls over the government’s economic oversight under the intrusive three-year Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP; World Guide 5).

In January 2006, after the national general elections judged fair and transparent by observers, ECOWAS inaugurated the new government of the Republic of Liberia. Her Excellency, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, became the first female elected as an African head of state, taking office as president and starting an ambitious reform agenda. Although Liberia has an elected government, structural sources of conflict still persist. Access to food, high unemployment rates, and other problems are critical needs to be addressed (World Guide 6).

The conflict in Liberia was a struggle for political power as well as for the control for the resources of the nation. As a result, Liberians destroyed the lives and properties of their people. People being suppressed or treated unfairly brings or creates conflict, and

when conflict is not dealt with prudently, people find new ways or reasons to continue the discord. The church is the prophetic voice of God that must speak against the ills in society as well as prevent conflict and its escalation, but if the church itself cannot resolve its internal strife, it will not be able to resolve conflict in society. This research provides suggested strategies that the LAC can use to resolve conflict in the conference.

The Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

American missionaries planted Methodism in Liberia in 1822, the day the *Elizabeth* landed on the coast full of freed American slaves to settle the country. Methodists and Baptists were among the settlers. In 1833, Rev. Melvin Cox of the Methodist Church in North Carolina came as the first Methodist missionary to Liberia. Unfortunately, Rev. Cox's missionary journey was short-lived; he died a few months later. After the death of Cox, the missionary journey to Liberia was opened. Two missionary couples, Rev. and Mrs. Rufus Spaulding, and Rev. and Mrs. S. O. Wright, arrived in Liberia. Mrs. Sophia Farrington also joined them. Thus, under the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Liberia Annual Conference was organized. Overseas missionaries provided the leadership. The General Church assigned bishops from the United States to provide episcopal leadership ("History").

The Methodist Church of Liberia remained a missionary conference until 1965, over hundred years. The general conference granted the Liberia Annual Conference a central conference status. In December 1965, the Liberia Annual Conference elected the Rev. Stephen Trowen Nagbe as the first indigenous Liberian bishop. Bishop Nagbe took over from Bishop Prince A. Taylor, Jr., the missionary bishop who was assigned to Liberia. Bishop Nagbe was a product of Bishop Taylor's vision of national

empowerment. Bishop Taylor encouraged the development of national leaders for the church. The Liberia Annual Conference elected the Rev. Bennie D. Warner, another churchman of tribal origin, when Bishop Nagbe died in 1973. Bishop Warner became vice president to President William R. Tolbert in 1977. Fortunately, Bishop Warner was in the United States attending general conference when the government of President Tolbert was ousted in the April 1980 coup. Bishop Warner was never able to return to his native land. In December 1980, the Rev. Dr. Arthur F. Kulah was elected. Bishop Kulah retired in 2000 and the Rev. Dr. John G. Innis succeeded him in December 2000 (“History”).

The United Methodist Church is the largest denomination in Liberia with a membership of more than 109,000. The conference has twenty districts, over seven hundred organized churches, and 850 pastors. The church operates several educational institutions, a large orphanage home, and one of the major hospitals in the country (GBGM Liberia-Mission Profile 2-3).

As reflected in the context of this study, Liberia suffered fourteen years of bloody, brutal civil crisis. This conflict produced wanton destruction of precious lives and properties. In these turbulent years, the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church played a proactive and constructive role in ensuring the coming of peace to this war-torn and wounded nation. Interestingly, as Liberia resurrects from the ashes of war in these critical and challenging periods of the nation’s history, the reality of the existence of church conflict, particularly intragroup conflict in the twenty-first century church, is exceedingly visible in the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Intragroup church conflict has not been a new problem in the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. In the 1980s, the bishop for life disagreement was a major dissension in the church. This debate, the life-tenure created division within the conference putting its witness at stake. The study of this past contention will help find ways in which the Liberia Annual Conference can bring about resolution in a Christian Liberian conflict when internal discord develops, especially intragroup church strife.

Methodology

This study was a qualitative research in the descriptive mode that utilized a researcher-designed interview.

Participants

The participants of this study were ten ordained elders in the LAC/UMC who have been successful in resolving church conflict in their ministries. I selected these participants on the basis of their age, gender, ministry position, educational level, years of experience in pastoral ministry, and effectiveness in pastoral ministry.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this research was a researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol. The instrument consisted of eight open-ended questions addressing the four research questions. The variable in this project was conflict.

Data Collection

I constructed criteria for selecting the participants and sent a letter requesting their participation in the interview process. On the basis of their responses, I sent further information concerning their involvement in the process and the assurance of anonymity.

I structured eight open-ended interview questions and pre-tested them twice, at an interval, among the Research Reflection Team (RRT) for refinement and administration. After these steps, I arranged a two-week interview schedule with the ten participants and administered a forty-five minute interview with each of them at their convenience. I immediately collected the data from the discussion within the interview at the end of each interview and prepared them for processing.

Data Analysis

I used content analysis for the data analysis. I coded and analyzed the data by manual transcription.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This study was focused on a criterion-based sampling and the voluntary participation of selected ordained elders in the LAC/UMC. The project is, therefore, limited. However, I found that those who participated in this research have effective strategies for conflict resolution that could be applied to conflict situations in similar contexts.

Theological Foundation

Conflict is not new to the church, nor is conflict resolution. The Scriptures contain the history of conflicts, as well as their resolutions, and the New Testament is replete with several models of how the early Church resolved conflicts.

Throughout its history, the Church's leaders have met to settle doctrinal issues. Church historians point to seven ecumenical councils in the Church's early history, especially the Councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (AD 451), yet the most important council was the first one, the Jerusalem Council, which was established to

answer the most vital doctrinal question of all: “What must a person do to be saved?” (Butcher 25). Acts 15 records a model of conflict resolution. This conflict has theological context, questioning the meaning of salvation and who can be included in the people of God. As the church in Antioch experienced remarkable numerical growth among the Gentiles (Acts 11:19-26) as well as being very active in missions, the Jerusalem Council was faced with the problem of circumcision (Acts 15:1-15). Although the church in Jerusalem had agreed that Gentiles could also be saved (11:18), some so-called conservative Jews believed that “Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses (Acts 15:5) in order to be saved (15:1; Fernando 414). Similarly, C. K. Barrett states that these conservative Jewish believers were saying one could not be saved unless he was circumcised (*The Acts of the Apostles: Shorter Commentary* 222). Hans Conzelmann concurs with Barrett when he writes, “Here the problem is set forth. It does not have to do with the admission of the Gentiles as such, but with the conditions for their entrance” (115).

According to I. Howard Marshall, the position of these conservative Jews was based on two reasons:

First, they found it hard to believe that Gentiles could be saved and become members of the people of God without accepting the obligations of the Jewish law. Secondly, there was also the question of how Jewish Christians, who continued to live by the Jewish law could have fellowshiped at table with Gentiles who did not observe the law and were therefore ritually unclean; not only so, but any food which they served to their Jewish friends would also be unclean. (242-43)

The Judaizers’ efforts to impose legalism and ritualism on the Gentile Christians as necessary prerequisites for salvation led the leadership of the church in Jerusalem to decide whether Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised to become full members of

God's family (15:14). Accordingly, the church sent Paul and Barnabas on a fortunate missionary journey that produced many conversions. This era of numerical growth and missionary endeavor gave rise to this dilemma.

Paul and Barnabas reported their success to the Antiochene Church, but their joy was unexpectedly dampened by some very conservative Jewish Christians who came from Jerusalem to Antioch. These church people demanded that Gentile Christians be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5). Circumcision was one of the cherished Jewish traditions that served, among other things, to set Jews apart from Gentiles. Many Jews regarded circumcision as one of the important marks that identified the people of God. Hence, the critical theological question arose. The early Church needed to decide if Gentile Christians had to be circumcised, in addition to believing in Jesus, in order to be saved and become full members of God's people. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they resolved the conflict in the following manner.

First, the senior and experienced church leaders gathered to discuss and resolve the issue (Fu 7). F. F. Bruce notes that one cannot be sure whether the whole church was present at this meeting (see vv. 12, 22). If so, the discussion and decision rested with the leaders (*Acts of the Apostles* 335). However, Richard N. Longenecker comments on Luke's use of the phrase 'the whole assembly.' According to him:

While Luke says only that the apostles and the elders met to consider these questions, his mention of 'the whole assembly' (Pan to Plethos) in v.12, and 'the whole church' (hole te ekklesia) in v.22 shows that other members of the congregation were also present. (240)

Because the problem could not be solved locally, some wise decision makers took control of the situation and sent a delegation to help seek a solution. "So Paul and

Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2, NIV). The apostles and elders were the leading figures in the church. The mature and experienced leadership of the church wanted the problem resolved in consultation with the leadership of the whole church; not by one or two individuals. This first point implies that to call together the wider leadership of the church to provide clarity and resolve pressing issues or problems, especially those of a theological nature, is expedient and wise. Worth noting is that the theological controversy was not allowed to hide and grow; it was brought into the open and fearlessly discussed. The principle of open discussion reflects the African traditional culture of dialogue. Traditional African context institute structures of dialogue in which palaver is openly discussed by the community.

Second, the church leaders reached their conclusions in accordance with personal testimonies, the scriptures, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem and were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders (Acts 15:4). After their arrival, they were the first to share about their missionary experiences among the Gentiles with the Jerusalem Church Council. However, some of the Pharisees objected to the report, demanding that the Gentiles be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5). The argument became very tense as the apostles and elders listened to the respective arguments of both sides. Then the apostle Peter rose to address the church council in support of Gentile inclusion by sharing his experiences in Cornelius’ household. He spoke out unambiguously in the interest of gospel liberty. According to him, God did not make any distinction between Jews and Gentiles when he gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to Cornelius. Peter’s main point was that the salvation’s open door took

place through God's initiative. Peter demonstrates selflessness in the midst of conflict. If this general discussion came after the humiliating confrontation in Antioch where Paul publicly rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11-21), and Peter is now the first to speak on behalf of Paul's side in the controversy, it shows that commitment to God's truth rather than to personal preferences and prestige is important in any church conflict. These leaders did not fight for their own interest. The next to speak were Barnabas and Paul who told of "the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them" (Acts 15:12). Barnabas and Paul's evidence supported Peter's argument.

Finally, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, makes his entrance. James enjoyed widespread respect and confidence. His personal character and record won the heart of those he led, even the Judaizers. James, employing wisdom, used Scripture to show that Gentiles can also become full members of God's people without circumcision (Acts 15:13-21; Bruce, *Book of the Acts* 215). Longenecker observes the profound presentation of James' comments on the matter:

If, as Luke's account implies, James in summing up made no reference to Paul and Barnabas's report, this was probably more for political reasons than any of principle. After all, it was the work of Paul and Barnabas that was on trial, and James wanted to win his entire audience to the position he believed to be right without causing needless offense. Therefore, he began by reminding the council of Peter's testimony, whom he called by his Hebrew name, "Simon" (cf. 2 Peter 1:1). And he showed how he felt about the question at issue by speaking of believing Gentiles as a "people" (laos) whom God has taken "for himself"... - thus (1) applying to Gentile Christians a designation formerly used of Israel alone and (2) agreeing with Peter that in the conversion of Cornelius God himself had taken the initiative for a direct Gentile ministry. (242)

Although James argued that Gentile converts are not to be troubled, he called for four abstentions. Gentiles are to abstain from defilements caused by idols, from fornication, from that which has been strangled, and from blood (Acts 15:20; Barrett *The Acts of the*

Apostles: Shorter Commentary 233). In other words, rejecting parts of the old life style gives evidence of change. This second step reflects a wise way to handle conflict within the church. Mediators must confront problems and give fair hearing to all sides of the argument. In addition, leaders who are spiritually mature and trusted to make wise decisions should participate in the discussion to resolve conflict. Kenneth O. Gangel describes James' role:

James models a participatory leadership style, able to moderate a public assembly with a broad view to the greatest possible benefit of the body of Christ. He is able to allow all viewpoints to be appropriately aired, summarizing the consensus of the assembly and preserving the unity of the Saints. (181)

The process the early Church used here is not random. They had people speak in their order of importance. This principle is a typical African one. In the African traditional palaver settlement, the disputants explain, the community talks, and then the chief speaks.

Third, the apostles obtained a consensus (Fu 8). The debate produced reasonable results that the whole church accepted; therefore, the whole church, including the apostles and elders, was involved in making the final Spirit-inspired decision, upon which the apostles and elders wrote a letter on their deliberation to the church at Antioch (Barrett, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary* 738-40). The entire church chose representatives to accompany Paul and Barnabas to deliver a letter of the church's decision to Antioch. The implication gathered from this third step is that when everyone is treated fairly in a conflict situation, they will abide by the decision reached to resolve the conflict.

The Jerusalem Council formulated a clear theological statement which they communicated to the church in Antioch as the final step (Fu 8). The complete Antioch church gathered to receive this major decision that had eternal consequences. They were

satisfied with the decision because it affirmed the freedom of the gospel in the midst of diversity and recognized different practices (Acts 15:23-31). The council made a fair and harmonious decision. The choice of Paul, Barnabas, and the Jews in Antioch to seek wise counsel from the apostles and the Word of God produced a tremendous growth in the Gentile church. Although the early Church handled the problem, it has continued to surface throughout the history of the church. Currently, the church wrestles with the question of whether or not a believer must become an American to be a Christian. The leaders of the church had the right approach to the problem. Huttenlocker affirms this truth states:

The apostles and elders in Jerusalem, who were the acknowledged power system of the church at the time, chose to operate an open rather than closed power system—that is, they provided for input from newcomer, Paul and his colleague, Barnabas. The emotions of conflict were abated.... Trust was generated. (133)

Huttenlocker's point about an open discussion in a conflict situation supports the fact that greater chances for conflict to decrease exist when the right approach, such as open discussion, is allowed. However, because of the presence of evil, having the right approach to the problem does not guarantee success. Christians are only asked to be faithful like the major prophets of old.

Conflict is inevitable and not new to the Church. A look at the Scriptures reveals that the church of God will always have conflict, but what is most important is the manner in which Christians are expected to handle conflict. Christians have a responsibility to do everything in the power of the Holy Spirit to resolve conflict in order to maintain the peace and unity of the body of Christ. Using the biblical model for

conflict resolution will provide peaceful coexistence among Christians in a tumultuous world.

Overview of Study

Chapter 2 reviews selected literature and pertinent research on the theology of conflict and reconciliation, and the studies of conflict and reconciliation.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the project's design, the research methods, and the methods of data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 reports major findings of the study and the practical applications that flow out of the research. It also offers suggestions for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

The purpose of this research was to identify and learn the causes of intragroup church conflict within the LAC/UMC over the life tenure episcopal conflict that occurred in the 1980s and thereby identify strategies that could be used to address current conflicts and conflicts that might arise in the future. Therefore, the bishop-for-life issue is a *test case*. I focused on the theology of conflict and reconciliation and the studies of conflict and reconciliation. The theology of conflict and reconciliation is the theological foundation for this study. Under the theology of conflict and reconciliation, I reviewed the biblical and theological foundation of conflict resolution as well as the nature of conflict, causes of conflict, levels of conflict, types of conflicts, and types of conflict resolution.

The Theology of Conflict and Reconciliation

The theology of conflict and reconciliation is the foundation that is biblically and theologically rooted, and ecclesiastically integrated in Christian conflict resolution. This foundation reveals God as the reconciling one who has called the Church to be reconciled and to become agents of reconciliation.

Biblical Foundation for Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is not a new concept. The book of Acts contains different kinds of disputes that the early Church resolved, two types of which are administrative and theological.

Chapter 6 of the book of Acts provides a biblical model of conflict resolution. This passage has to do with the issue of economic distribution conflict and then resolved

with an administrative solution. This conflict is the first major intra-church conflict in the book of Acts. According to this passage, a dispute arose between the Greek-speaking Jews and the Hebrew-speaking Jews concerning the daily distribution of care. Acts 6:1 records that when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews to the Hebraic Jewish leaders because the Grecian widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. This problem was critical and posed a threat to the church's mission by the apparent divisiveness between the two groups. The church was growing, and conflict within the body jeopardized the established unity. The crisis was primarily related to a gap in administration. Up to this time, the Hebraic apostles had responsibility for the administrative duties. The apostles had received all the voluntary offerings and had been responsible for their distribution among thousands of believers (Acts 4:34-35).

The response of the apostles to the crisis in this passage is very illuminating. A keen observation shows the following: first, the apostles dealt with the problem. They did not ignore the problem or deny its existence. Instead, the apostles adopted a proactive approach, rather than a reactive one, when the Grecian Jews leveled a complaint against them. Their acknowledgement of the problem and decision to face it squarely reflects their humility and maturity. The apostles were not defensive about their performance, nor did they insist on maintaining total control. This attitude on the part of the apostles demonstrates the statement—the best way to escape from a problem is to solve it.

Second, the apostles made a solution available. They recommended appointing people to manage the welfare system or take over the responsibility of caring for the widows. In doing so, the apostles ensured those in charge would be able to complete the

task successfully. The apostles asked the people to recommend from among themselves seven spirit-filled and honest persons with wisdom for the task. This method implies that a helpful approach to an administrative problem or conflict should focus on appointing the right people to the task (Adeyemo 1310).

Third, the apostles came to an agreement before implementing their suggestion. The suggestion of the apostles “pleased the whole multitude” (Acts 6:5) because of the consensus gathered. The community made the decision. Everyone approved of the suggestion and was involved in appointing the seven leaders.

Fourth, the community made a good decision. They chose people filled with the Holy Spirit and this process was accompanied by prayer. Hence, the end result of the whole process was greater growth in the church (Acts 6:7). The administrative problem that the church was faced with and that threatened its unity now resulted in enormous growth (Acts 6:7). This result was possible because the apostles faced the problem and controlled it in a spirit of humility and maturity under the guide of the Holy Spirit (Fu 7). Furthermore, the apostles’ approach to the complaint did two things that enabled a win-win solution for the church leaders and Grecian Jews: They faced the problem immediately and openly, and they allowed the Grecian Jews to have ownership in the solution.

The Pauline Epistles also discuss conflict resolution in the early church. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians speaks about their division, and his letters to the Ephesian and Philippian communities speak to them about unity.

First Corinthians 1:10-13 is a model of conflict resolution, and is one of the major passages that handle resolving conflict. This passage manages the problem of division in

the church and Paul's response to the problem. Divided allegiances became a crisis situation in the Church of Corinth. The church was split over differing allegiances to Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ. The Corinthians had divided themselves into divisions, schismata, or cliques that may have been precipitated by the spirit of intellectual pride which characterized the party spirit (i.e., I am for Paul; I am for Apollos; I am for Peter; I am for Christ) in Corinth. Church members boasted in their loyalty to a great leader and claimed superiority to those who followed an inferior leader. Paul identifies the core of the problem as personal pride in party membership. Apparently the division, which was fueled by personal pride, was destroying the unity of the church. Against this background, Paul provides a response to the divisive factions in the Corinthian Church with the hope that it will stop their warring attitude (Bruce, *International Bible Commentary* 1350-51).

Paul's response to the divided allegiances in the Church of Corinth was to admonish them to guard their unity in Christ. Paul does this by calling the Corinthian Christians' attention to the reality of their union with Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul underscores the word "our" in the phrase "in the name of *our* [emphasis mine] Lord Jesus Christ" to reflect this truth. He uses this attributive adjective to show the Corinthians their identity of oneness in the undivided Christ. In other words, because Christ is undivided, those who are in him remain undivided. In the midst of the Corinthian Christians' different backgrounds and different orientations as converted Jews and Gentiles, Paul reminds them they have one Lord. This relationship of position in Christ reveals that unity can be attained and maintained. Paul affirms this truth with the threefold interrogative in 1:13 about the impossibility of Christ being divided. He asks,

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:13). He discourages the idea of making Christ the property of any small section of the church. Additionally, Paul helps the Corinthian Christians understand that their failure to present a united front is unhealthy and unnatural. Hence, he challenges them to seek unity, not uniformity, among themselves. Alfred Poirier sees Paul’s exhortation to the Church of Corinth is applicable to the local church today:

Thus Paul can ask rhetorically, “Is Christ divided?...” Christ is not a commodity to be bought and sold to the highest bidder, nor is he a slave to our self-interest claims. We cannot declare, “Christ is ours,” and imply, “therefore, he is not yours.” Yet that is exactly what Christians in conflict do. We seek a monopoly on Christ. Christ justifies me, not you. Christ supports my version of the story, not yours. Christ approves of me and my responses, and he condemns you. So Paul asks “Is Christ divided?” (194)

Seeking a monopoly on Christ makes it easy for disputants to justify their claim and fail to see their fault. Also, the division means the Corinthian Christians were saying they alone follow Christ, and others do not.

A few things emerge from the passage that Christians can use to resolve conflicts in the church. First, those in leadership, or pastors, should help Christians or church members understand they are obligated to guard the unity of the body of Christ against human pride. Second, Christians should seek, and be encouraged to celebrate, the basis for their unity. God has chosen to save them by his mercy, for his glory, through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. No other leader that can take the place of Christ. Additionally, Christians in conflict need to comprehend that they are all part of an undivided Christ. As such, a family divided is foolish. Union with Christ is union with his body. Christians need to know who they really are and from where they have come. Third, Christians

should be reminded that God will hold them responsible and accountable if they dishonor him by disrupting the church (Crouch 14).

Another model passage on conflict resolution is 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. In this passage Paul addresses the issue of Christians taking their disputes before civil courts (Poirier 108). A commentary background of this passage explains that civil litigation was a common practice in ancient Corinth. Some of the Christians in Corinth took their legal disputes to the civil courts which were officiated by pagan judges. These pagan judges decided the property disputes of the Christians. The Jews established their own courts because they refused to allow Gentiles to mediate their disputes (Crouch 15).

Paul was troubled by the Corinthian Christians' poor testimony before a watching world. Their failure to resolve conflicts brought into question their credibility to witness to Christ (Poirier 111). Like Paul, Poirier believes leaders of the church must be concerned when the church in conflict misbehaves before unbelievers (111). Against this background, Paul admonishes the Corinthian Christians to stop taking each other to court.

Paul's admonition is based on this line of argument. First, he explains to the Corinthian Christians that the unrighteous have no authority over the Church because they lack God's wisdom (1 Cor. 6:1). Second, he goes a step further by bringing to their attention that Christians are competent to settle their own disputes (1 Cor. 6:2-3). He reveals in verses two and three that Christians will judge the world and judge angels (i.e. fallen angels). Third, he states in verse four that unbelievers are not qualified to settle Christians' disputes. Fifth, in verses six through eight, he tells them how their conduct disgraces Christ. In other words, their lawsuits against each other represent an utter

failure of their Christian brotherly love. Paul is of the opinion that they should be willing to accept losses for the glory of Christ. Instead, they attempt to cheat others (Crouch 16).

From an evaluation of Paul's response, the following comes into sharp focus: Paul was not advising the Corinthian Christians to surrender all legal rights; however, he would probably agree that sometimes disciples must surrender their legal rights for the glory of Christ. Christians can surrender their legal rights when they put off self-promoting antagonism, self-serving interests, greed, adversarial spirit, uncharitable judgments, and suspicions, and put on love (Poirier 217). Paul encourages Christians to settle their legal disputes before Christian judges. He almost certainly had in mind a parallel to the Jewish custom. The idea for Christians to settle their disputes before Christian judges implies church leaders should establish a forum that will enable disputants to submit their disputes for address (215). Furthermore, Paul shows few things would disgrace Christ more completely than for Christians to bring legal disputes against other Christians before pagan judges. This behavior is grievous because it is a sin against a brother or a sister in Christ (136). Poirier sums up Paul's argument:

Paul's point is clear. We are family—God's family. The issues at hand are not about you or me but about "us," the family of God. And our conflicts are not to be flaunted before the world; they are to be kept within the family. (109)

God's Church needs to understand that it has been given divine mandate to mediate as well as arbitrate conflicts between believers. This model of resolving conflict is practiced in the African context. When a problem arises in the town the people are encouraged to take it to the elders or chief for resolution. This system is a symbol of the town's ability to solve their own problems.

Ephesians 4:1-6 is one of the passages in the Pauline corpus that deals with care of conflict resolution. This passage speaks about unity as the preferred outcome in conflict situation. Paul asserts in the book of Ephesians that God has united Jews and Gentiles, the new society, as one holy people (2:11-23; 18, 19), which implies the church is one new people of God. In this book, Paul believes that the church exists to glorify God (3:1-13; 9, 10). If the church exists to glorify God, then Paul urges that the lives of Christians must reflect this unity of position. He summons the Ephesian Christians to make Christian unity a reality in their relationships with one another. Hence, he challenges them to guard their unity in Christ (Crouch 21).

Paul names humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and striving to maintain the bond of peace as qualities that promote unity. These qualities should be exercised as one works through conflict (Stott 148-50). In Ephesians 4:1, he sets the basis for his exposition by challenging the Ephesian Christians to “live a life worthy of their calling,” having spoken about God’s sufficiency to meet every need, in the concluding section of chapter three, Paul acknowledges his status as a prisoner of the Lord. This admission implies that Paul suffered and refused to demand his freedom as prisoner (Rom. 1:1). Paul implied, when explaining to the Ephesian Christians, that their calling demanded consistency between their position in Christ and their lives in the world (Eph. 4:1). They were to live a life that would glorify the Lord (Eph.4:1-6:20).

Paul is not finished. In the preceding verses, he fleshes out in more specific ways how the Ephesian Christians are to live a life worthy of their calling. In Ephesians 4:2, Paul admonishes them to “be completely humble.” That is, not to have an exalted position of themselves. He reminds them that the call to unity in Christ is also a call to

emulate the humility of Christ, which Paul describes in Philippians 2:1-11. Paul warns that pride would divide the community. Therefore, he challenges them to follow the humility of Christ, who, though rich and great, voluntarily endured the shame of the Roman cross for their redemption. Paul is admonishing them to display humility, not because they are inferior to other people, but because they should not regard themselves as better than others (Crouch 22).

Next, Paul admonishes them to “be gentle” in Ephesians 4:2. He adds the virtue of gentleness to the Christian virtue of humility. He tells the Ephesian Christians that, to live in a manner consistent with the call to peace, one must also cultivate Christian gentleness, which means to be considerate and demonstrate mercy toward people, even one’s enemy. This gentleness is to permeate their relationship with one another and with others outside the faith. Subsequently, in verse two of the same chapter, Paul instructs them to “be patient.” He adds the word *patience* to the twin virtues, humility and gentleness, as the third virtue that would characterize the lives of peacemaker. Paul’s use of the word *patience* implies that some of the Ephesian Christians will be difficult to understand. Therefore, he uses the above word to remind the Ephesian Christians that a peacemaker must be patient with others. The Ephesian Christians are expected to endure unpleasant circumstances as well as unpleasant people. They are to avoid the desire to seek revenge or escape when others annoy them (Crouch 23).

Third, in the latter part of verse two, Paul encourages them to “bear with one another.” His use of this participle parallels closely his admonition to patience. The phrase implies misunderstanding, disappointment, and abuse. It entails enduring the weaknesses of others. In other words, to live in peace, one must learn to bear with these

weaknesses. Paul is aware that, because of the endless variety of temperaments among them and the diverse racial and social backgrounds from which they have come into the community of faith, there would be argument, division, envy, jealousy, and domination, which are the natural tendencies of human behavior. However, Paul urges them to endure, to put up with difficult circumstances, and to bear with difficult people. Paul wants them to be responders, not reactors (Crouch 24).

Fourth, in Ephesians 4:3, Paul appeals to them to “strive to maintain the bond of peace.” Paul not only challenges them to demonstrate attitudes that promote unity and to bear with one another, but he also calls them to peace-making. He summarizes the virtues of peacemaker by admonishing them to expend all necessary effort to maintain the peace of the body of Christ. In Ephesians 2, he reminds them that peace is God’s gift to the Church. In Ephesians 4:3, he reminds them that their responsibility is to guard this precious gift. Paul encourages them to strive, to hasten, or to hurry so as to not lose an opportunity. They were to make every effort or to endure all hardship to accomplish this goal. In other words, to do their best as when one defends a prized possession. This bond of peace is the union where the interests of all parties are concentrated, cemented, and sealed. Finally, in Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul concludes by showing them that the basis for their unity is the oneness of God: one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is the Source of all (Earle 1179).

In this passage, Paul provides qualities that contribute to managing or resolving conflict so that unity and peace result among believers. He believes when disputants exercised humility, gentleness, and patience with one another, a positive approach to conflict would achieve more results and workable processes in managing or resolving

conflict. These qualities show consideration for others and make allowances for their shortcomings.

Philippians 2:1-4 is another Pauline passage that discusses the issue of conflict resolution. In this passage, Paul discusses unity through humility by urging believers in the Church at Philippi to unite in Christ and guard their unity. He exhorts the Philippian Christians to reflect the life of Christ in their own lives, which is made possible by humbling themselves, laying aside their personal interests and focusing on the needs of others (Crouch 50).

One of the key themes in the book of Philippians is the repeated call to unity and care for one another. The call to unity implies the presence of division or fractured relationship among the Christians in Philippi. This conflict is explicitly addressed in Philippians 4:2 (Poirier 119). Paul emphasizes unity among the Philippian Christians and between Euodia and Syntyche, because unity is a mark of strength and the hallmark of the gospel (Fee 75-169).

In Philippians 2:1, Paul explains how union with Christ should have a personal effect on the lives of the Philippian Christians; hence, they are expected to reflect the life of Christ in their attitudes or characters. In Philippians 2:2 he instructs them to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” Paul states that their union with Christ creates unity among them because of its interpersonal dimension. This instruction interprets Jesus’ saying, “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25).

Paul warns in verses three and four of this chapter that attitudes, such as selfish-ambition, vain conceit or pride, lack of humility, looking down on others, and focusing

on one's own interests can cause disunity. Therefore, he exhorts the Philippian Christians to have concern for the Church and themselves and have the mind-set of togetherness. They are to put away pride and boasting (Barton 51-54).

Paul's admonition to the Philippian Christians to unite in Christ is relevant to a church that has been permeated with divisions and party strife. The church can overcome the problem of division if Christians will yield to the call or develop the attitude to care for the interests of others. In other words, the process of resolving Christian conflict, especially interpersonal or intragroup conflict, must be interest based. This approach is possible in conflict situations when Christians do not only look at the issues and positions but the interests of others. Poirier says that conflicts are about persons before they are about problems (159). Although they will always have problems to resolve, Christians should reconcile people and then resolve the problems.

Furthermore, Paul's admonition to look to the interests of others affects two parties—one's own interests and the interests of others. The process takes into account the interests of the disputants on both sides of the conflict. Furthermore, this interest-based conflict resolution is in harmony with Jesus' statement to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Loving one's neighbor as oneself necessitates that a Christian looks not only to his or her own interests but also to the interests of others. Paul's admonition challenged the Philippian Christians to resolve their conflicts in a Christ-honoring fashion and to guard Christian unity by following Jesus' example.

Principles for Resolving Conflict

The following principles emerged from the above biblical materials. I believe if the church in Liberia implements them, crisis in the church will be seen as an opportunity.

1. Church leaders should deal quickly and openly with potential problems.
2. Church leaders should appoint people who are capable, who have the right gifts, graces, attitudes, and motivation to a task when faced with administrative conflict.
3. Church leaders should seek consensus between disputants to make decisions in a conflict situation and avoid the use of their power to manipulate a conflict situation.
4. Church leaders should involve the wider leadership of the whole church in resolving pressing issues and avoid the opinion or view of one or two individuals.
5. Church leaders should give a fair hearing to all sides of a dispute before making a decision and treat all contenders fairly.
6. Everyone should guard the unity of the church against pride and self-interest.
7. Church leaders should create an atmosphere that will encourage disputants to bring their strife before them.
8. Church leaders should accept wrong done to them by their brothers and sisters in the Lord and avoid revenge or recompense.
9. Church leaders should always exercise humility, gentleness, and patience as they work through conflict situations.
10. Church leaders should look out for the other person's interest in a conflict situation.
11. Church leaders should not allow ungodly people to judge their legal contention.

12. Church leaders should work with, not over or against, those they lead.
13. Church leaders should help people understand that Christ is for ALL Christians.
14. Church leaders should depend on the Holy Spirit and prayer for a solution in every conflict situation.
15. Church leaders should strive to make good decisions in a conflict situation.

Theological Foundation for Conflict Resolution

Conflict is real and does exist. Poirier admits, “It erupts unexpectedly, catching us off guard and leaving us perplexed by the anger, unreasonableness, and even belligerence of another” (72). Conflict is not bad, however, it can be good. It can produce change, growth, and opportunity. Also, conflict is the drama of biblical history that reflects the Fall and its consequences, as well as the redemptive work of Christ (76-77). From the fact that conflict can be seen in God’s creation (Gen. 1:31) and God has responded to it (Gen. 3:15), one can infer from Scripture that God ordained it (Acts 2:23; Rom. 11:36; 1 John 3:7-10) for his redemptive purposes (74-75). Thus, the Church should see conflict and conflict resolution as a God-given opportunity for their good and his ultimate glory. The Church’s role in conflict resolution should be to produce unity and peace, not to avoid or deny conflict. Conflict is productive and necessary when someone is clearly wrong.

The doctrine of the Trinity provides the foundation for conflict resolution. This basis for resolving conflict can be found through the Godhead’s unity in diversity, which is based on mutual submission and deference to the other. In order to understand the concept of unity in diversity of the Trinity, believers need to understand that the Trinity is a relational being. A keen observation from Scripture reveals the triune God, who is of

one substance, power, and eternity, and exists as one in the communion of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This truth implies the triune God is a relational God. The three persons of the Trinity do not dwell and act in isolation, although they are distinct from one another. That is, the triune God exists in an eternal, interpersonal relationship with one another. This relationship is referred to as existence in relationship (Seamands 34). In summary, the triune God is a communion of inseparable persons in relationship and equal unity.

The Church of the twenty-first century needs to understand that the triune God reveals that persons are vitally relational (Seamands 35). Thus, the Church should avoid the practice of treating persons as objects as well as avoid impersonal execution of ministry (39). A constructive approach to resolving conflict and a vibrant Church result when the Church emulates the “divine life” of the triune God. The Trinity gives the model of developing submission and deference in human relationships and relationships in the Church (35).

The Trinity and Submission

Submission is one of the characteristics that defines the relationships between the triune God. This characteristic is reflected in the self-sacrificial attitude of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit where each person constantly denies himself for the sake of the others. Stephen Seamands observes that Christ’s death on the cross is an expression of God’s sacrificial love for humankind (78). The Son was able to give his life because of his obedience and humiliation (79). He did all this because of the Father’s desire. Jurgen Moltmann says that the cross is the heart of the triune God:

The Cross is the center of the Trinity.... Before the world was, the sacrifice was already in God. No Trinity is conceivable without the Lamb,

without the sacrifice of love, without the crucified Son. For he is the slaughtered Lamb glorified in eternity. (83)

The cross existed before the foundation of the world. When you take away the cross, the essence of the triune God is lost and the mission and purpose of the Godhead is defeated.

The triune God's personhood and identity are subjected and established respectively by the others. Self-serving and self-seeking are absent in the role of submission between the Godhead (Seamands 80). The Church will be able to deal positively with conflict if it employs the submissive nature of the Trinity. This approach will provide the opportunity to focus on the needs and interests of others instead of their own. The comfort, rights, preferences, and privileges of others will be of paramount importance.

The Trinity and Mutual Deference

Mutual deference is another characteristic that exists among the triune person. This characteristic handles the distribution of responsibility. Consideration of the wishes of others occurs among the Godhead with each deferring to one another, thus enabling them to be in control and maintain consistency and stability.

Seamands comments on the deferring nature of the triune person when he states "mutual deference is reflected in the Father's empowering of the Son and the Son's use of power only under the Father's authority" (37). If Christians emulate the triune relation of mutual deference, they will have flexibility, respect, humility, and courage in their interactions with one another as they work through conflict situations. In other words, mutual deference will empower them and enhance their relationships with one another.

Using the Trinity as a theological foundation for conflict resolution creates unity in the midst of diversity. The three persons of the Trinity are different in function but one

in nature. Likewise, the Trinity is the ground of both our unity and our diversity within the Church. God himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is one God and believers are all his one people. Therefore, Trinitarian theology provides the basis for resolving conflict in the Church.

A Historical Foundation for Conflict Resolution

I am an ordained United Methodist elder in the Liberia Annual Conference, hence examining the way John Wesley resolved conflict is expedient. Throughout his ministry, as well as in his writings, Wesley had a high expectation of greater Christian cooperation and unity between believers who sought to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Wesley strived for fellowship, cooperation, and tolerance in conflict situations based on his catholic spirit. Wesley's catholic spirit was one of Christlike love and openness towards other believers in spite of divergent views (Thorsen 79). His catholic spirit was simple love for others. This catholic spirit did not accommodate antagonism (79). However, Wesley's catholic concern was not natural or artless. Wesley was clear about certain doctrinal issues that continue to separate Christians (79). Similarly, Wesley's catholic spirit did not tolerate doctrinal issues that went beyond the parameter of the authority of Scripture (Coppedge, *John Wesley* 172).

Furthermore, Wesley's catholic spirit *of love* is illustrated in his sermon from 2 Kings 10:15 which says, "Is your heart right, as my heart is toward your heart.... It is. If it is, give me your hand" (NKJV). In the exposition of this text, Wesley challenged his friends that had theological differences with him to "give him their hand" *in fellowship*. In other words, Wesley sought cooperation with those who differ with him on issues. He extended a "hand of fellowship" to all, according to Donald A. D. Thorsen, "whose hearts

were right with his heart” (161). Concerning Wesley’s statement “give me thy hand,” Allan Coppedge explains, “by this often misunderstood statement, Wesley meant that the two parties were to love one another, pray for one another, provoke one another to love and good works” (*John Wesley* 172).

Wesley exemplified his catholic spirit in his response to the controversial issues of predestination and perfection that had developed among leaders of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth-century (Coppedge, *John Wesley* 14). These issues were chiefly responsible for the division that occurred in the Methodist societies in 1741, with Wesley and George Whitefield as the major players in the conflict. Although these controversial issues disrupted the unity of the church, generally, a friendly atmosphere was present (16).

The conflict that occurred between the two best friends, Wesley and Whitefield, was primarily based on the issues of predestination and perfection (Coppedge, *John Wesley* 14). Wesley opposed the teaching on election and final perseverance of the saints. He did not agree that God elected some people to salvation and passed by others (39-40). Also, Wesley did not accept that the saints could not fall from grace or perish eternally (139). Wesley taught “universal redemption” and “Christian perfection” that said salvation was open to all people, although humans were capable of accepting or rejecting this offer, and that Christians were expected to live a holy life which was not absolute perfection.

In contrast, Whitefield opposed the teaching of universal redemption and perfection. He taught the doctrine of election and final perseverance because he believed God did not elect all men to salvation and that the saints could not fall from grace

(Coppedge, *John Wesley* 139). He accused Wesley of promoting “absolute perfection,” that is, “man could not sin again after conversion” (92), which he believed was impossible.

Wesley and Whitefield had an exchange of words because of the controversy between them. Even though the communication contained “arguments, admonitions and entreaties between the two leaders” (Coppedge, *John Wesley* 95), it was “carried on in the spirit of warm affection and mutual esteem” (84). Commenting further on the tactful handling of the conflict between Wesley and Whitefield, Coppedge shares, “A keen fraternal spirit pervaded their communication and each seemed especially desirous to avoid any separation” (84).

The conflict between Wesley and Whitefield did not only exist between the two; both sides in the conflict had participants. For example, Whitefield, John Cennick, Howel Harris, William Seward, and Joseph Humphreys were on one side while Wesley, his brother Charles Wesley, and others were on the other side (Coppedge, *John Wesley* 15). However, my focus is on the two key players, Wesley and Whitefield, and how Wesley resolved conflict.

John Wesley was a man of peace, although his response to issues that he regarded as dangerous sometimes appeared somewhat inconsistent with this attitude of peace. The peaceful attitude of Wesley can be seen in his response to conflict situations. A careful analysis of the conflict between John Wesley and George Whitefield reflects how Wesley resolved conflict.

Generally, Wesley used collaboration as his mode of resolving conflict. He sought genuine cooperation in resolving the dispute between Whitefield and himself. From the

outset of the theological conflict, Wesley was circumspect in his response to the issue of predestination. Wesley's response was due to the fact that he had high concern for their relationship. Sharing on Wesley's reluctance to immediately respond to the development of the issue, Coppedge states, "[T]wo days later, on Sunday, April 28, 1739, Wesley wrote his famous sermon on Free Grace. Still reluctant to make an issue of the doctrine, he cast a further lot for guidance on whether or not to preach that particular sermon" (*John Wesley* 45). Of course, the "Free Grace" sermon of Wesley is what sparked the theological conflict between them.

Subsequently, Wesley responded to the issue of predestination when he felt it was necessary to do so because of unjust accusation against him (Coppedge, *John Wesley* 46), and when he did respond, he separated the issue from the people involved. Usually, he was hard on the issue and soft on the people involved. He aimed at confronting the root of the problem. Moreover, in the ongoing dispute, Wesley avoided trading personal attacks against Whitefield, even when he became the victim of them. Once, Whitefield publicly revealed a private communication between Wesley and himself that dealt with Wesley's use of lots for guidance (96). Whitefield also publicly preached against Wesley and his brother Charles (95), yet Wesley's response was to avoid making a personal attack against Whitefield. He avoided revenge or recompense. He assured his friend Whitefield that there would not be any reprisal from him (96). Wesley had a positive attitude. He never returned railing for railing but spoke well of Whitefield at all times and in all places (95).

When Howel Harris, one of the disputants who had earlier settled his difference with Wesley, decided to mediate between Wesley and Whitefield, Wesley further

exhibited his collaborating attitude towards Whitefield because of his constant desire for peace and reconciliation between the two of them. First, Wesley identified with Whitefield's interest in the dispute. His love and concern for Whitefield, especially during the heat of the dispute, is a classic, unquestionable example (Coppedge, *Shaping the Wesleyan Message* 93). Wesley, quoted in Coppedge, states:

I read over Mr. Whitefield's account of God's dealing with his soul. Great part of this I know to be true. Oh 'let not mercy and truth forsake thee! Bind them about thy neck! Write them upon the table of thy heart!' (93)

Wesley's affection allowed him to accept the sincerity of Whitefield in the reconciliation talk.

Second, Wesley was willing to make a concession in order to reach an agreement and achieve reconciliation with Whitefield:

Wesley ... however, continued to seek a measure of theological consensus. His "strong desire to unite with Mr. Whitefield as far as possible" led him to consider again three of the major points of controversy. Under each section Wesley indicated how far he could go to reach some agreement. (*Shaping the Wesleyan Message* 94)

Similarly, Wesley's anxiety to be at peace with his friend is reflected in his journal after his meeting with Whitefield in 1755, as quoted by Coppedge: "Wesley wrote:

'Disputings are now no more; we love one another, and join hand to promote the cause of our common Master' (*John Wesley* 157). In addition, in 1764 Wesley wrote a peaceful letter calling on Whitefield and others to demonstrate love and respect for each other by putting away negative criticism and envy (173).

Indeed, the reconciliation process achieved the reestablishment of personal fellowship between the two friends. Although Wesley and Whitefield held to their

respective theological views, they exchanged warm letters and visited the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London (*Shaping the Wesleyan Message* 93).

The respect and love these two Methodist leaders had for each other greatly helped in the reconciliation process. For example, Whitefield said of Wesley after their reconciliation that Wesley would “shine bright in glory” (Coppedge, *Shaping the Wesleyan Message* 93). Wesley said of Whitefield when he preached his funeral sermon, that Whitefield was one of God’s great saints who, through his preaching, had brought multitudes of sinners to repentance in Christ, something that had never been done since the times of the apostles (*John Wesley* 169).

In summary, Wesley was a man of peace who sought to guard the unity of the Church. He was an agent of reconciliation who exercised humility, gentleness, and patience in conflict situations. Moreover, he focused on the interest of others; hence, he could caution those who disagreed with him to not allow people to exploit their dispute. Similarly, Wesley challenged both his followers and those who differed with him on issues to seek peace and unity. Wesley was never deterred by obstacles to peace, and he appreciated the efforts of those who promoted peace. Wesley sought collaboration as well as fellowship wherever possible. He was tolerant and fought for fraternal unity. Wesley was interested in tackling the root of the problem. He was always willing to meet and discuss with those who differed with him on issues that were beyond the parameter of the Scriptures, and went as far as affirming his commitment to them. Wesley strove for a win-win solution to conflict because he saw the conflict as a problem to be solved, not a contest to be won. I strongly believe Wesley’s constructive approach to conflict was possible because of his love for God and neighbor.

African Understanding of Conflict

The Traditional African concept of conflict and its resolution varies from culture to culture and nation to nation on the continent of Africa. Following are some African tribes' understanding of conflict.

The Shona of Zimbabwe

In Southern Africa, the Shona of Zimbabwe see conflict as misunderstandings between people that retard development. According to the Shona, conflict interferes with relationships and affects the quality of life. The Shona use proverbs in conflict resolution. Some of these proverbs are *Mosva Haiori*, which literally translates, "An offense should not get rotten." It means, "If you offend someone, do not expect the offense to disappear by waiting years before you apologize." Another proverb, *Chinemanenji hachifambisi*, *chinomirira mavara acho kuti chionekwe*, means "Crime or sin cannot be hidden forever; it will definitely show up by whatever means." The Shona people resolve conflict at four levels. The four levels are referred to as the *household/family*, which has one level, and the *traditional leadership*, which has three levels. Under the household, people who are involved are Tete (aunt), Sekuru (mother's brother), Muzukuru (son resolves conflicts in mother's family), and sahwira (family friend). Baba (father) is the last resort and may constitute an appeal court.

The traditional leadership court, which is referred to in Shona as *Padare*, reflects the following three levels:

1. *Dare rekwa Sabhuku* (Village Head Court): Matters are primarily reported here. The village head tries small cases or small crimes such as straying cattle, fights between men and women, and community thieving. Sentences are mostly restitution, along with beer.

2. *Dare rekwa ishe* (Chief's Court): It handles more serious cases such as those involving serious fights causing injuries, or witchcraft; penalties are payment of one or more cattle, or goats, and restitution in general.

3. *Dare rekwa mambo* (King's Court): It also handles serious cases that the chief may not manage. The *Mambo* is in charge of many chiefs so he is a referral and an appeal court; penalties include expulsion from village, and payment of cattle, or goat.

At each of these echelons, selected elders assist in the hearing of cases and hand over the final judgment. The *sabhuku* sits with his elders every time a case is reported. The *ishe* and *mambo*, however, sit once a month to hear cases in their *dare*. The *dare* is a local court where cases are heard and settled. They usually sit on the last Sunday of the month.

The procedure in resolving conflict among the Shona is as follows:

1. In case of emergency, a case is reported to the village head, chief, or king.
2. The chief dispatches messengers across the village. They go beating drums: a characteristic drum-beat indicating that a case needs attention.
3. The elders congregate at the court or *dare* at an appropriate time.
4. The chief calls in the accused and complainant to hear the case.
5. After evidence and cross-examination, the chief excuses the complainant and the accused and the council deliberates on the matter. The council makes all

considerations and call in the parties. The *sabhuku, ishe or mambo* hand over the judgment in full view of everyone present (Mutambirwa).

The Igbo of Nigeria

In West Africa, the Igbo people of Nigeria share similar thoughts with the Shona people on the meaning of conflict. The Igbos generally view conflict as misunderstanding. Furthermore, the Igbos do not admire conflict. They like to avoid it because sometimes they see it as originating from the devil. However, they believe that conflict is inevitable; hence, mediators should exercise caution in handling it. In an effort to discourage conflict, the Igbos employ the following proverbs:

Ochu nwa okuko new ada, ma nwa okuko new igba oso—“He who pursues a person with less power will fall while the weak person goes without harm.”

Ocho ugu agbala oso, mgbe obiara—“He who wants war should not run when it comes.”

Ocho ugu ga ahu ugu—“When you look for conflict you will see one.”

Adabe isi agwo, ahu ya ga bu eriri—“When the head of a snake is cut, the remaining body becomes ordinary rope.” In Igbo philosophy, it means that when the major cause of a problem is removed, the remaining problem becomes weak.

In resolving intragroup conflict among the Igbos, the following steps are considered:

1. They choose a mediator who does not have an interest in any of the disputing parties to chair the discussion. In other words, a mediator who has no personal interest in

the matter is the best person to mediate. This mediator could be the council of elders, chiefs, the king himself, or a well respected person.

2. The mediator endeavors to find out who is the cause of the quarrel by separating the people from the problem.

3. When the mediator finds the offending party, the elders condemn the attitude of that person.

4. The elders ask the offending party to pay some fines as punishment.

5. Often, the elders demand an apology from the offending party.

6. At times, in a sensitive case, nobody is condemned, fined, or ask to apologize, to avoid further problems.

7. Also, in some cases, the mediator warns the group of the consequences of starting another conflict (Agbakwuru).

The Sierra Leoneans

The people of Sierra Leone in West Africa call conflict in their local (Creol) language *palaver*, which means quarrel. The Sierra Leoneans see conflict as something that destroys family, tribe, and culture; therefore, when conflict occurs, the Sierra Leoneans strive for unity in resolving the conflict. Their most common proverb in a conflict situation is translated, "Tongue and teeth are in the mouth, yet they fight." By this proverb, they are saying people should not allow conflict to have the final say. This proverb challenges disputants to seek oneness amid conflict.

Within their tribes, the Sierra Leoneans take the following steps in effort to resolve conflict:

1. The tribal leaders employ the mediation process.

2. Tribal leaders gather and call the parties involved in the conflict.
3. The leaders listen to explanations from both parties.
4. After explanations are complete, the leaders ask both parties questions.
5. After the questions, the elders look at the matter from different levels, because the leaders consider the disputing parties one family. After this step, the leaders directly try to make the parties understand they are one from the same family, tribe, culture and ethnic group.
6. After the tribal leaders have made an effort to help the disputing parties see the need to reconcile, the most respected of the elders addresses the parties. When this person speaks, nothing more is said than for the disputing parties to agree to reconcile. Elders are highly respected among their people and nobody wants to disrespect their advice or wisdom.
7. The parties then shake hands and hug one another. Afterward, a fellowship meal is held which consists of either drinks or food (Boyce-Caulker).

The Ndendeuli of Southern Tanzania

According to P.H.Gulliver, among the Ndendeuli of Southern Tanzania a dispute is not a self-contained, isolated social event, for it occurs in the context of the continuum of community life. Disputes are discussed in a formal assembly referred to as a *moot* (32). A *moot* is convened by one of the disputants who wishes to bring the matter to active, public consideration, or it may be convened by a neighbor who is structurally intermediate between the disputants or who, definitely on one side or the other, is influential and active enough to assume initiative and leadership (32). The *moots* are

usually held on neutral ground, often at the house of an intermediary, though if the dispute is not too serious, it may be held at the house of the defendant (32-33).

The process of dispute settlement among the Ndendeuli includes the following steps: First, The disputants recruit their own action sets. The members of the action set advise their principals (i.e., the plaintiff and defendant), sit with them in the *moot*, speak on their behalf, cross-examine speakers from the other side, and assist them in negotiating their case. Second, although the *moot* is an arranged arena of dispute, it is fairly informal. Participants sit on the verandah or under the eaves of the house and on the ground in front of it. Generally, a certain amount of moving about is customary, and the two action sets are often not clearly distinguishable to the eye. Those participants who are structurally intermediate tend to sit in the middle of the gathering, demonstrating their lack of definite allegiance to one side or the other. These participants are the influential supporters and influential intermediaries of the principals, the plaintiff and defendant. Neutral neighbors, if any, usually sit at the edge of the group. Third, normally, the matter is described first by the plaintiff, and the defendant then replies with his own account, but not infrequently, the defendant begins, rebutting what is already a well-known complaint and perhaps making a counterclaim. Fourth, thereafter, discussion is free and open to anyone present, even occasionally to neutrals, though on the whole discussion tends to be dominated by the principals, one or two of their more influential supporters, and influential intermediaries. Often two or more men speak at once, especially when discussion becomes heated. Primarily, each man is allowed his uninterrupted say, as ideally he should. Fifth, a speaker remains sitting where he is, and may be interrupted or questioned while he is speaking. The men know one another well. They are neighbors

who meet frequently in all sorts of circumstances. Equality among them is assumed, and even when emotions run high, willingness to let each person have his say and to listen to him with tolerance and respect is encouraged. Sixth, discussion is often disorganized and rambling, but only the grossest irrelevancies are summarily checked by the impatience of the audience. Men are not obliged to speak, although unless they are clearly neutral, they should indicate their support of their own principal and of the final decision, if any, that is reached (33).

The Liberian Understanding of Conflict

Liberians are people of peace, although this character has recently been stained with fourteen years of bloody civil crisis. The Liberian culture is one that is relationally-focused. Traditionally, Liberians have been good managers of conflict in the past. The palaver hut, in the Liberian culture, symbolizes the recognition of conflict and the resolution of conflict. Under the palaver hut (a hut is where the meeting takes place), elders seek common ground when conflict arises. Elders listen, investigate, and resolve disputes. Below, I have presented three of the Liberian tribes and their understanding of conflict and its resolution. These tribes represent the northern, eastern, and western parts of Liberia (Ministry of Education 25).

The Belle of Liberia

The Belle tribe of northwest Liberia considers conflict as *talking*. This understanding of conflict as *talking* makes them take conflict seriously. The Belle feel uncomfortable with the negative result conflict, or *talk*, produces. They believe when conflict occurs, the tribes break away and the family is destroyed. The Belle people have a parable that says, “When the family scatters it is not wrong, but when *words*, *talk*, or

conflict scatters the family, it is bad or wrong.” For example, if family scatters, members are still able to visit one another; however, when *words* or conflict causes members to scatter the family, visitation is impossible. Similarly, the Belle believe when they solve a problem they do so with one word. When dispute arises, the people do not have one *word* or one agreement. This statement is illustrated, in their local setting, by their use of the palm nut head. The palm nut head has thorns on it. If the people decide to roll the palm nut head forward, they must be in one accord. If they are not in agreement, or have one *word*, one group may be rolling the palm nut head forward while the others may roll it backward. The people will not accomplish moving the palm nut head forward and they will suffer pains from the thorns of the palm nut head.

The Belle people have a positive approach to contention when it occurs. They reflect this approach in their major proverb, which reads *Kala ne menwu*. The translation of this proverb is, “Tongue and teeth are in the mouth yet they quarrel, but you cannot throw them out.” Likewise, they have a very high esteem, or respect, for their leaders, especially when they settle cases. The leaders in the villages easily notice discord because violence is taboo among the Belle people.

The Belle tribe adapts different approaches to various dissensions with slight variation in the methods. Intragroup conflict is a serious problem among the Belle people. When disputes happen, the following steps are employed to resolve them:

1. The elders take the conflict to the chief elder and his deputy who serve as a neutral third party.

2. The chief elder, who then becomes the presiding person, will convey the settling of the conflict on neutral ground, or in the elder's room, by calling in the disputing parties to hear their sides of the conflict.

3. After the disputants' explanations, the chief elder and the other leaders will ask the parties to excuse them for some minutes because they want to establish who is really wrong. When the parties have gone out, the leaders determine who is right and wrong and why, on the basis of all they have heard.

4. After the leaders' deliberation, they call in the parties and inform them that they both have wronged the land (that is, the mother land). When this is said, the parties acknowledge their wrong and apologize to the leaders for the wrong they have done. This is the beginning of the resolution. If the two parties will admit to the leaders' claim and apologize, they have something in common for which they can be reconciled. Both have erred and need to forgive each other.

5. After this apology, one of the parties will then ask the leaders, "How about my case with this person or my opponent?" At this point, the leaders will come up to say who is really wrong and why they are wrong.

6. The one who is in the wrong will apologize to the leaders, and the leaders will ask this person to extend that apology to the one who was wronged.

7. Afterward, the leaders will ask the offended party to speak. This time the communication, or speaking, is between the victim and the offender. The leaders seek resolution here. The leaders anticipate a positive response from the innocent one to the guilty one. In other words, the leaders expect the victim to say, "I forgive you" to the offender. If the innocent one responds in the negative by saying, "No, I don't forgive

you,” the leaders will continue to persuade or talk to them until a positive solution is found. However, if the innocent one insists on a negative response, which is difficult to do because of the respect held for the elders, the leaders will take a stern action against the victim because he or she has disrespected the elders by having negative response. Usually, the punishments are these: A man will cut the grass on the road that leads to the farms and work on the community farm. A woman will hoe all the grass in the town and on the road leading to the waterside where everyone goes to fetch their drinking water.

8. After the innocent one has forgiven the guilty one, the leaders will tell the offender what the victim has done, and the leaders and everyone present will go to the victim and shake his hands and thank him.

9. The guilty one will then provide cold water, which is strictly drinks for refreshment. With this, the conflict is ended and resolved (Kowula).

The Kru of Liberia

The Kru tribe of southeast Liberia sees conflict as something that destroys family, quarter (neighborhoods or a town), and even lives. They believe conflict brings division that affects one generation after another, especially if not settled. Hence, they do not welcome conflict. The Kru people’s understanding of conflict is further seen in the below proverbs:

1. *Nyee tai meh son funn kai ei nenebo*—“Teeth and tongue can clash yet they live together.” This simple proverb means when discord occurs, effort should be made to settle whatever misunderstanding that exists.

2. *Glegbee cheteli ja nye kpla cheteli*—“Children’s confusion brings adult’s confusion.” In other words, when children start to quarrel and adults do not handle the

situation carefully, it turns into adult confusion. Additionally, no strife should be considered insignificant because it might turn to the unexpected.

3. *Dweh son yema funn bloh ja swen*—"When two elephants fight, the grass suffers." Dissension is contagious and will indirectly or directly affect everyone when nothing is done about it.

The traditional leaders of the Kru people do not allow conflict to separate them, so they always find a solution to settle their disputes. However, if conflict exists, the elders apply the following steps in resolving the contention.

1. When a conflict arises, the elders of the town, village, or community will call the parties involved, including their witnesses, to settle the confusion; or, the victim carries the complaint to the elders, and the elders call the parties involved. Sometimes, the elders invite other elders of neighboring towns or villages, depending on the magnitude of the case (that is, if names of people from neighboring villages or towns are mentioned in the quarrel). Depending on the nature of the case, the chief elder may ask the town crier to assemble the people.

2. Following, the elders will assemble for the hearing on Sunday because people do not work on their farms on this day. The parties involved will come with their followers. At the gathering, an elder, who is older, outspoken, fearless when rendering judgment or decision, and assumed to be wise, presides over the hearing. This presiding elder uses the slogan, *ba-tee O ba-tee*, which means "we live," to call the people's attention. The presiding elder will ask someone to pray, and after prayer, he gives his opening remarks.

3. The elder will ask both parties and their witnesses to explain the cause(s) of the strife, after his opening statement. During the explanations by both parties and their witnesses, the presiding elder may allow the two sides in the conflict to ask each other questions from the explanations. The elders will then ask the parties and their witnesses questions.

4. After the explanations and questions, the elders will ask the parties and their witnesses to excuse the assembly for about fifteen to thirty minutes. During this time, the presiding elder and the other elders will make a decision in the interest of both parties.

5. The presiding elder calls in the participants for the hearing of the assembly's decision on the case. Once again, the presiding elder calls the people's attention by his use of the phrase *Ba-tee O ba-tee*. When the elder has the people's attention, he submits the elders' decision of who is right, and who is wronged, to the parties. The offender then bows down to the victim, apologizes, and asks for mercy. In response, the innocent one places his or her hands on the shoulders of the guilty one and says, "I forgive you."

6. The dispute is now resolved. The assembly celebrates the peace between the parties with palm wine, kola nuts, and food. The victim and offender embrace each other, shake hands, and share the kola nuts (Weagba).

The Kpelle of Liberia

The Kpelle tribe of north-central Liberia considers conflict *misunderstanding*. Like other tribes, the Kpelle are uneasy when conflict occurs between them. Therefore, the Kpelle people intervene to arrest the situation. They feel that dissension destroys unity, community, and society. The Kpelle tribe sees conflict as the enemy of good society. Because of this concept of contention among the Kpelle people, they teach

conflict resolution in their traditional/local school known as the Poro Society. In the Poro society, the Poro values are adhered to when resolving conflict. The people are not expected to question the decisions of the elders in passing judgment because they believe that the leaders are capable people and can lead (Gibbs 348-49). The Kpelle tribe believes when strife has occurred, disputants should accept it. They say, “The wrong has happened; we have to accept the bitter pills.” Africans use proverbs in conflict situation to teach object lessons that will challenge disputants to settle their disputes. When the Kpelle resolve discord, the following are some proverbs that are made to remind the disputing parties about the need to be reconciled.

1. *Nuu Nen da Nyin da Koi*—“Your teeth and tongue can fight.” This translation means conflict is inevitable and it occurs between families.

2. *Kaala wulu a pele ke va yale*—“The family tree can bend but cannot break.” This proverb teaches that no matter the degree of the contention, it can be solved.

3. *Nama ka nu kwei ge wulorkporlu*—“Human has blood and yet eats red oil” is the rendition of this proverb. It means discord occurs because people make mistakes; hence, people should be able to correct their errors.

4. *Kpenyen la va tee zi nu ma*—“No matter how long an okra tree, it cannot be taller than the owner.” In other words, disputants should listen to the advice of mediators or peace brokers during the resolution process.

The Kpelle tradition approaches cases from different perspectives. When intragroup conflict occurs, the Kpelle people use the following steps:

1. Sometimes, the town chief or elder takes the initiative to talk to the disputing parties out of concern for what is happening.

2. The elder or town chief calls disputing parties to a neutral ground which is either the elder's house or the town chief's house, called government house, or under the palaver hut, which is a place where men meet to discuss the common good of their quarter and environment.

3. The elders arrange for disputing parties to meet at this neutral ground and ask each of the parties to explain their side of the story. In some areas, both parties will be allowed to ask each other questions after their explanations. The elders may allow witnesses and the people attending the meeting to ask the parties questions.

4. After the parties' explanations, the elders will evaluate them thoroughly to find out who is wronged and who is right. In some places the parties are asked to excuse the elders for a few minutes. The elder will then deliberate on the disputant parties' explanations and allow the people to share their views on the issue in order to learn who is right and who has been wronged.

5. If the parties did not go outside, the elders tell them who is wronged and who is right. If the elders sent them out, the protocol person will call them in and give a parable about conflict resolution. When the protocol person has given the parables, the elders will first address the guilty one and state why he or she is wrong. If the offender refuses to accept the elder's decision, he or she will be persuaded until that person accepts the decision. When the offender admits the wrong, the elders instruct individual to shake hands with the victim. Afterward, the elders will ask the guilty one to bring or present cold water, which could be drinks or kola nuts. Generally, people use the kola nuts in the Liberian culture to symbolize appreciation, forgiveness, apology, and pure heart.

The reason for presenting either the drinks or kola nuts is twofold: it is a sign of peace or reconciliation and a means to appease the *living deads* who might have been offended by the disputing parties during the conflict. In the traditional African worldview, the *living deads* are the deceased whom the Africans believe are alive in the spiritual world, and serve as guarding angels for the community and every family. The *living deads* are considered to be givers of blessings and curses and could be happy or displeased with the behaviors of those that are alive. The communities highly respect the *living deads*. For example, during a dispute, a person out of anger may have sworn by saying to his opponent, "If I speak to you or reconcile, then my dead mother or father should carry me to the grave." This statement shows disrespect for the *living deads*, and is the reason the disputing parties will take the drink or kola nut and give it to each other to drink or eat, and afterward, pass it onto their followers. Everyone present will partake of it, including the chief or the elders. The parties are reconciled and the conflict is finished. Sometimes, the parties are allowed to say something to each other after the conflict has been resolved. Everyone then goes home.

In other areas of the Kpelle tribe, once the offender admits the wrong, they are asked to give a kola nut to the victim. A terrible issue requires, a sacrifice and the two parties are responsible to provide the items for the sacrifice. After the sacrifice, the elders will ask the two parties to provide drinks for them. The conflict is resolved and everyone goes home (Darwolor; Fania).

The Bassa of Liberia

The Bassa tribe of southwest Liberia considers conflict as confusion. When conflict happens they are tense and stressful. Hence, they make all effort to settle it. The Bassa people's understanding of conflict is reflected in the below proverbs:

1. **Geeyua tua doyee ke alni sor dae**—"The fingers can shake in its handle but they do not move out or get out." The meaning of this proverb is we can have our differences and still be together.

2. **Suahsua dae nyon dabin dea koen**—"Upon the old mat we plait the new one." The interpretation for this proverb is the chief will build on old story.

When conflict arises among the Bassa people, they employ the following steps to resolve their disputes.

1. Any member of the family will tell the disputants to stop the quarrel and encourage them to wait for the chief elder who is the oldest person in the town, whether he has the experience or not.

2. The person who stopped them will go to the chief elder and brief him on the happenings.

3. The chief elder will order the town chief to call all of the people of the town to their house. The town chief is the messenger of the chief elder. The chief elder is higher than the town chief.

4. Everyone meets under the palaver hut which is close to the chief elder's house. The palaver hut is built by all the men in the town and is intended to resolve all matters, among other things.

5. From the disputants, the chief elder along with the town chief and wise women ask the oldest person about what happened. When this person is explaining everyone is expected to be quiet and attentive. Because the town chief wants everyone to listen, he will designate someone who will fine anyone caught disturbing or interrupting.

6. When the first party is finished with the explanation, the younger party will be asked if they have any comment on what has been said.

7. If they answer in the affirmative, they will be given the permission to ask questions. If no, the older person will be asked to sit down and the younger person will be asked to stand up and explain.

8. After the younger person's explanation, the same process of asking questions will follow.

9. When the younger person is finished, he sits down. The chief asks the audience if they have any question for the disputants (the person receiving more questions is likely to be in the wrong). The chief allows the audience to ask questions because they want complete resolution so that no one goes home complaining they were not given the chance to ask questions.

10. After the hearing, the chief elder will ask the younger one first if they will be pleased if they rendered decision as to who is right and wrong. The same is applied to the older one. After the responses of the disputants, if they agreed, the two will be asked to excuse the audience, and be escorted by the messenger who will make sure the disputants are not together in the meantime. If the disputants say no to the question, the elder will arrange for them to be taken to the town which is another level for settlement from the village level.

11. The messenger will report to the people that the disputants are separated. Then the chief elder will put forward to the body what has been heard to determine who is right or wrong. At this time, the people are allowed to express their view on the issue while the chief elder and his lieutenants will look on in silence.

12. After the discussion among the people, the chief elder will bring out similar situations or old stories from the past and relate it to the current situation as to how it was solved.

13. After everyone is completely convinced of who is in the wrong, the disputants are called inside.

14. The chief elder comes in at this junction to talk. He will look into the eyes of the one that is wronged and say it, and to the one that is right and say it as well as apologize. Then he will take his seat. The people are silent at this point and say nothing.

15. Then the guilty party will stand up and ask, "How am I wrong and why do you say I am wrong?" The Chief elder stands again, using sweet words in a polite manner, will say "My son we are not against you...." He makes the person feel good and explains all that has been said. Then the chief elder will take his seat. Another person will get up and advise the one in the right by saying he is responsible for some of the things that happened. This admonition is given to avoid leaving the place as a winner. The offender's wrong exceeds the defender's wrong, that is why they are right.

16. After further explanation by the Chief elder to the disputants, the two will be asked to "knock glass," that is to drink. If the drink is alcoholic, palm wine, the disputants will drink from one glass. If they do not drink alcoholic drink, they drink water with the oldest being the first and followed by the younger. After this, the two hug each other

followed by laughter by everyone. During the hug, the younger one will say, “sorry.” If they are the same age, anyone can be the first to apologize and the elder will fine them to give a gallon of drink each for the play. Merry making follows in the town, and the disputants are told what happened should not be heard again (Saynwrap).

Summary

Some Africans do not deny the existence of conflict neither do they welcome it because of their understanding of its negative effects. When dissensions occur, these Africans consider them to be serious because they affect their communal lives. Hence, they put in place different methods or approaches that will reach an agreed settlement of the disputes. This process is usually an open one which is chaired by respected and influential leaders who have good reputations, personality, and age. Some of the Africans’ use of proverbs and their resolution processes are conciliatory in nature from what have been looked at.

The American Studies of Conflict and Reconciliation

Conflict often appears overwhelming, confusing, and unmanageable to those involved, as well to potential interveners. Understanding conflict is a start toward resolving it. Therefore, the study of conflict and reconciliation is necessary for review.

The Nature of Conflict

I have considered under the nature of conflict, its definition, inevitability, destructive, and constructive nature.

Conflict Is Defined

The word *conflict* comes from the Latin word *confligere* (con = together; fligere = to strike) which means “to strike together.” This root word implies a collision or

disagreement; a controversy or quarrel; a clash or collision; a battle, or struggle which is usually prolonged. Therefore, “Conflict” is considered to be a clash, collision, struggle, or disagreement between opposing views, values, ideas, interests, motives, or desires (Webster Pocket Dictionary and Thesaurus 49). In addition, conflict is defined as a process in which an effort is purposely made by A to offset the efforts of B by some form of blocking that will result in frustrating B in attaining his/her goals or furthering his/her interests (Gray 5). When conflict is mentioned, it is generally believed to be a bad omen and people try by all means to avoid it. Similarly, it could be one reason why people would not want to have anything to do with such (Brunk 25). When conflict occurs, usually two people opposing each other are involved. These people are pursuing their goals and competing for the same resources or space. Conflict can become negative and escalate when other people’s views and ideas are considered less important or irrelevant, when their motives, desires, or interests are not highlighted during discussion or decision making, or when their values and self-esteem are diminished and not regarded by the other party in the process of decision making.

Conflict as Defined in the African Context

The above is a dictionary meaning of conflict, but here is a practical meaning of conflict. Conflict is cultural, and Africans speak the language of conflict. In the Shona tribe of Zimbabwe, the word conflict is referred to as *Nhau* or *Nyaya*. This means disagreement, squabble, or misunderstanding. In the Igbo language of Nigeria, conflict is called *Inwe nghotah*—misunderstanding; *Ise Okwu*—quarrel; and *Ilu Ogu*—fight. Among the Belle tribe of Liberia, conflict is called *Dan Siye Kulu* which means exchanging words. The Kru tribe of Liberia calls conflict *chetela* which means confusion and among

the Kpelle tribe of Liberia, conflict is called *Laasa* or *Layah* meaning misunderstanding. Conflict has taxonomy (e.g. disagreement—argument—fight—battle—war). It develops from one level to the other when the process is not addressed, and this taxonomy is found among Africans. For example, the taxonomy of conflict in the Kru language of Liberia is : *ble—lee*, the first level of conflict, and it means fuss or misunderstanding. When it occurs, there is a break in relationship. A *blelee* that is not settled turns to *plepleh* which is a quarrel. The occurrence of *plepleh* produces bitterness, avoidance, and indirect communication between the disputants. When *plepleh* is not handled on the second level, it leads to *cheteli*, which is the third level and confusion beyond limit. At this level, there is more bitterness and fight. The Bassa tribe of Liberia called conflict *Zanzan*—serious talking where profane words are used and *Zarr*— case or palaver to be discussed. If the *Zanzan* reaches to fighting, it is called *Vonvon*— fight.

Conflict Being Inevitable

Conflict is an inevitable cultural process common to all important relationships. . Conflict is prevalent in some societies, occurs occasionally in other communities, and happens infrequently in some cultures. Conflict is different from culture to culture. All leaders face the challenge of overcoming it. Since conflict is inevitable, people should not ask the question whether it will come or not, but how will they handle it. Unfortunately, most churches look at conflict with a negative eye and attempt to oppose or suppress it. Churches avoid major issues that are held strongly when they arise. Instead of facing them openly to avert them becoming destructive, they avoid the issues. Such an attitude of conflict repression eventually leads to a destructive effect on the people or the institution involved. Conflict must not be denied but dealt with constructively.

Additionally, conflict has three approaches. They are the traditional, human relations, and interactionist views. The traditional view flowed from the Hawthorne studies of the 1930s and 1940s. This view assumed that conflict was bad and it was a dysfunctional outcome and to be avoided. The human relations view which dominated conflict theory from the late 1940s thru the mid-1970s considers conflict as a natural occurrence in all groups and organizations. Conflict existence cannot be eliminated therefore it should be accepted. The interactionist view which dominates the current attitude towards conflict theory accepts conflict and encourages it. This view holds that conflict keeps groups from becoming static, therefore leaders should work to maintain an on-going minimal level of conflict (Gray 5).

Conflict Being Destructive and Constructive

Conflict can be destructive or constructive. When Africans hear the word *conflict*, thoughts such as disunity, war, quarrel, opposition, exchange of words, disagreement, misunderstanding, and confusion come to mind. All these thoughts seem to be negative. However, conflict has positive aspects. Unity, peace, togetherness, change, and growth are all words that reflect the positive side of conflict. These two sides of conflict—destructive and constructive, negative and positive—affirm the Chinese symbol for conflict, which means “danger” and “opportunity.” Conflict is dangerous because it harms people and destroys their relationships. Conflict is an opportunity because it causes human beings to reflect on life. When conflict occurs, the option is not whether to experience the conflict or not but whether it will be handled constructively or destructively (Lewis 23). Conflict is destructive when people project selfishness, blame

and attack each other, and cover things. It becomes constructive when the interests of others are considered because disputants seek a solution to the problem.

McCullough gives a description of destructive and constructive conflicts. He describes constructive conflict as “the clashing of goals that challenge one’s energy, creativity, or competitive spirit. It usually leads to constructive ends” (32). Similarly, he describes destructive conflict as “a clashing of goals, but it depletes one’s energy, creativity, and the will to reach constructive ends. This happens when people are demeaned and attacked in a conflict” (32). Norma C. Everist presents a succinct description of these two general levels of conflict. She describes destructive conflict as a conflict that “spirals downward” (26) and productive conflict, a different use of the term constructive, as a conflict that “moves from contention toward collaboration” (26). McCullough and Everist agree that constructive or productive conflict moves upward because one’s energy is challenged into productivity and destructive conflict moves downward because one’s energy is depleted from being productive. I concur with them because conflict produces energy and the wise use of that energy can become constructive while the unwise use of it can become destructive.

In addition, “creativity” in McCullough’s description of constructive and destructive conflicts is important because it provides a means to creative conflict resolution. In describing creativity, Lewis points out that “to be creative means bringing new possibilities into being that presently do not exist. Creative conflict management means creating new alternatives that allow maximum fulfillment for all parties involved” (12).

Conflict is not static; it moves in different directions. It can be destructive at one point and constructive at another point. This see-saw dynamic of conflict is considered by theorists of conflict as overlapping between destructive and constructive conflicts. A conflict may appear to be destructive at a point, but turns out to be constructive and vice versa. Everist says, “What may seem destructive for a while, in the end may actually be productive” (27). Everist alludes to the ebb and flow of most conflicts. Taking into consideration the movement of conflict, disputants should know when they have slipped from one area into the other, and to watch for feedback from the opponent’s action. When disputants realize their position in conflict situation, they are aware of their roles, whether they are constructive or destructive in the conflict. The see-saw movement of conflict should offer hope to disputants who desire a just resolution in a conflict situation. Contenders should use their energy and time to produce a resolved conflict. The nature of constructive and destructive conflicts can be seen in the table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Levels of Conflict

Constructive					
Level	Opposition Is Seen As	Dominant Attitude	Communication	Means of Resolution	Likely Result
Creative nudge	Chance to grow	Excitement	Free flow	New creations	Win/win/win
Challenge	Problem/ mystery to solve	Stimulation	Cooperative	Support / collaboration	Win/win
Contest	Competition	Determination	Selective	What rules permits	Win/lose
Destructive					
Level	Opposition Is Seen As	Dominant Attitude	Communication	Means of Resolution	Likely Result

Dismissal	Invalid	Disinterest	Only that required	Avoidance	Temporary suppression
Fight	Enemy to defeat	Anger	None direct	Limited cold war	Win/lose/lose
War	Enemy to destroy	Righteous fury	Only to deceive	All out, few limits	Lose/lose
Annihilation	Evil to obliterate	Possession	Condemnation	Suicidal terror, no limits	Lose/lose/lose

Source: McCullough 21

Types of Conflict

Conflict can exist at a variety of levels making it complex. However, identifying the various types of conflict provides a means of approaching them. I have listed below five types of conflict that are general to the Church and incorporate other conflicts.

1. The intrapersonal or personal conflict: This conflict is within an individual. The discord is internal and struggles “over matters of conscience, choice and well-being” (Everist 15). The root of this contention comes from the human nature that has been affected by sin. The sinful nature makes discord destructive. In addition, this strife gives rise to interpersonal conflict which is relational and communal conflict.

2. The interpersonal conflict: Here, the dispute is between individuals, is more visible, and is often encountered by leaders (Patterson 82).

3. The intragroup conflict: Intragroup dissension occurs within a group or the disputing factions within an organization. Patterson states, “such conflict of course, is only interpersonal conflict in a group setting...” (83).

4. The intergroup conflict: Variance between two or more groups is called intergroup dissension. In this discord, the dispute is usually between the leaders of the opposing groups or their spokespersons (Patterson 83). When reconciliation is reached between the two leaders or among leaders, it affects their followers or the groups (83).

5. The individual and the organization conflict: According to Patterson, this contention deals with “a person’s philosophies ... which conflict with those of the entire organization” (83).

All of the above types of conflict explain the inevitability, pervasiveness, and complexity of conflict that exist in the daily lives of humans from the individual level through the interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and organization levels. This chain of conflict shows the connection of conflict and its dynamics. For example, one cannot experience an intragroup conflict without an intrapersonal conflict.

The Causes of Conflict

Conflict rarely emerges from a single cause. When people understand the causes of conflict, they are able to deal with conflict constructively.

The causes of conflict range from structural to personal factors as well as external factors to the structure and the person. . Patterson lists five areas which conflict may emerge from. His theory is a redundancy and explanation of the above three approaches. His list contains “psychological, that deals with people’s personalities and temperaments; sociological, that deals with differing learning, behavioral and decision styles of people; physical, that deals with age, sex, and racial groups of people; positional, that deals with one’s position in the organization or group; and religious, that deals with differences of opinion, interpretation and denominational upbringing and background that have been conflict areas for centuries” (82).

Sharing on the basic causes of conflict, Speed Leas identifies “personal shortcomings, unresolved problems and congregational patterns of behavior” (104) as some root causes of church conflict. According to him, personal shortcomings include

fear, sin, and needs (104-06). Leas believes conflict occurs when church people allow fear to overshadow their ability to think through a situation thoroughly, and fail to make the right kind of decision in the interest of people involved. Furthermore, when people fail to recognize the impact of their sinful nature, such as selfishness, egocentrism, arrogance, or prejudice in handling issues (104-06), it gives rise to conflict. Leas concludes that these shortcomings come from within the person (106).

Leas refers to unsolved problems as issues that come from “out there” (106). For Leas, the phrase “out there” is the external issues with which one is confronted. These problems include issues, dichotomies, and value differences (106-09). Finally, Leas points out social factors, such as behavior patterns of individual and institution, as a cause of conflict (112-13). Lewis’ position on the causes of conflict is similar to that of Leas. The two men blend what can be referred to as theological and psychological theories of the causes of conflict. Specifically, Lewis sees the root of conflict as being found in human nature *the fallen nature* (11):

One root is our intentional, purposeful nature; a second our perceptual framework determining the choice of goals important to us; a third, our social nature. We are social beings whose goal fulfillment is achieved in an environment that includes other persons. There we also discover the goals of others claiming the space we intend to occupy. (11)

I agree with Lewis that the sinful nature is the principal cause of conflict because conflict is first intrapersonal before it becomes interpersonal.

Leas and Lewis are of the basic opinion that the sinful nature is the principal cause of conflict. They show that the intensity and degree of conflict may vary, but conflict is present in every human situation. Their views confirm the inevitability of conflict. Leas and Lewis’ views call us to self-examination. Usually in a conflict

situation, disputants easily point accusing fingers at one another, instead of first taking a look from within by genuinely considering whether in any way that particular individual has contributed to the conflict. This question is relevant in a conflict situation because participants are likely to forget about their roles in a conflict.

Poirier, in his analysis of James, chapter four, describes human desire. According to him, human desire is demanding, damning, distorting, and good. He refers to the description of human desire as the primary cause of destructive conflict. Like Leas and Lewis, he argues for self-examination because he believes conflict erupts from the heart (Poirier 53). His statement is an allusion to Matthew 15:19 that says evil attitudes stem from a corrupt human nature. He adds that church leaders have the responsibility to challenge people to first examine their own behaviors:

As church leaders, we are called to turn people's eyes first on themselves, on their own attitudes and actions, because James' first lesson is that reconciliation of conflicts must begin by having the parties examine themselves and their desires. (53)

Poirier argues that each person is responsible when conflict occurs, because strife comes from within. With this view, disputants should be slow to shift blame or avoid shaping blame. In other words, disputants must shift their thinking from accusing, blame-shifting, and minimizing their sin. They are to get the log out of their own eyes (Matt. 7:1-5).

Basically, Poirier, Lewis, and Leas agree that conflict develops within the human personality, but do this with different approaches. David W. Kale and Mel McCullough suggest three categories in their survey of pastor's responses regarding the causes of conflict: relationship problems, spiritual problems, and differences over mission and direction (31). According to Kale and McCullough, the statistics show the dominant areas were relationship problems and spiritual problems (31). Additionally, they list

communication problems, power struggles, value and need differences, need for respect, scarce resources, and change as responses gathered from others about the causes of conflict (32-39).

Ron Susek speaks about the causes of conflict from a psychological perspective. He claims that all humans have certain psychosocial needs, such as water, food, shelter, security, affection, and worth, and when these needs are denied or improperly fulfilled, people become dysfunctional in their relationships. He maintains that people seek to meet these needs in different ways at various stages of their lives, but they do continue to try to satisfy them. Accordingly, he lists the needs as follows:

1. A sense of acceptance: People want to be approved into a group.
2. A sense of personal achievement: People have a basic drive to acquire something.
3. A sense of value to a group: People will give or make sacrifice for the group and they need to be rewarded.
4. A sense of safety: If people must always prove themselves and are worried about being discarded, they will not function well and probably will launch attack.
5. A sense of destiny: People need to feel that they are making progress, heading somewhere (7).

Susek states, "Danger lurks when you are frustrated in one or more of these areas. When people fail and your position is not fulfilling, your destructive behavior may surprise even you" (8). Susek's theory shows that people are physical, longing, choosing, thinking, and feeling beings. Conflict quickly develops if these five areas of human personality are hindered.

The Stages of Conflict

Conflict is dynamic. It has various stages. Primarily, the five stages of conflict one must understand to be able to see the increase and decrease of conflict in order to provide a relevant approach to correct the situation are listed below:

1. Pre-conflict: During this period, the incompatibility of goals between two or more parties is not noticeable to the eyes of the public, but the disputants are aware of its potential for confrontation and open conflict.
2. Confrontation: Here the conflict is more open and there is defiant behavior by the parties, who may feel there is a problem; thus, parties prepare for increased resistance and violence, as well as seeking allies. Relationships are very strained and polarization occurs among the followers of each party.
3. Crisis: Conflict is intense. Normal communication ceases and counter accusation increases against each other in public.
4. Outcome: Since a cause-and-effect principle is present, the conflict eventually leads to an outcome where there might be a win-lose situation, the surrender of one party, negotiation between parties with or without a mediator, or an arbitrary imposition on the disputants to end the conflict. Tension, confrontation and violence decrease with the hope of a settlement or finding common ground.
5. Post-conflict: In the post-conflict stage, either mediators or disputants resolved the conflict with an end to confrontation and decrease in tensions. Normal relationships resume between parties. However, if mediators or disputants do not correct the root causes of the problem, this stage may erupt into another pre-conflict (Collins 25).

Different Responses of Conflict Resolution

David W. Augsburger (9) lists six responses that are common in dealing with conflict. The six responses are

- Avoidance: conflict is handled by denying its existence or by attempting to evade it through strategies of overlooking, or ignoring.
- Repression: Open conflict is avoided by explicit action to punish or suppress its expression.
- Displacement: Conflict is avoided by projecting a part or the whole into another party or to a different issue with the same party.
- Management: Conflict is directed in a limited or sequential manner or with diminished intensity by mutual agreement.
- Resolution: Conflict is terminated by changes that alter its causes or modify its driving forces.
- Utilization: Conflict is used not only to achieve a new integration of goals and values but to effect creative change in the system itself (42).

People utilize all six methods for conflict resolution at one point or another depending on the circumstances, issues, and intentions of the person. The first three methods of conflict resolution reflect low concern for preserving the relationship in conflict, while the last three reflect high concern for preserving the relationship in conflict. Of the above methods, the resolution method is ideal for intragroup church conflict because it places the conflict in the context of a problem to solve with the

anticipation of cooperation and collaboration from the disputants so a win-win situation results. The resolution method is the most effective method.

As stated in Chapter 1 of this research, three types of conflict resolution are basic to the Church: the win-lose approach, the lose-lose approach, and win-win approach.

In the Win-lose approach, the majority, minority, or leader becomes the winner (Patterson 86). This approach is more appropriate if it redemptively serves the goals of the group as a whole rather than personal goal. An example of this approach is the parliamentary procedure (86).

For the lose-lose approach, disputants may reach a compromise initiated by a neutral party. All the parties lose something and the loss is less than what is gained. Because disputants may fail to see reality due to the positions they hold, a neutral party comes in to help them reach a compromise (Patterson 87). Patterson states, “At other times, it may be necessary to give side-payments (promise of support, cooperation, or commitment) to one or both of the participants so that the group goals can be achieved” (87). Again, whatever solutions one may use in resolving the conflict so that a Christian outcome results, redemptive measures should be applied (87).

The win-win approach, is the most positive of the three because everyone in the group or conflict wins (Patterson 87). Of course, negative outcomes occur when disputants abuse the approach. Moreover, the win-win approach has honesty, openness, trust, and mutuality. All parties are winners. Negotiated solution is another name for the win-win solution. Disputants negotiate with each other to find an acceptable common ground or solution to the conflict. A difference between the Western “Win-Win” concept and the African “Win-win” concept, for example, is that in the West, if a husband and

wife had a misunderstanding, the court system resolution or settlement usually bends in favor of the wife rather than the husband. In some African contexts, the elders would strive to produce a reasonable compromise between the two.

Of the three approaches, the win-win approach is ideal for a church in conflict. It shows high concern for all parties. The win-win approach provides objectivity and common ground for all parties in a conflict to reach a satisfactory agreement or mutually beneficial solutions. Moreover, the negotiated approach fulfills the mission of the church which is to be reconciled and be agents of reconciliation in a world of conflict. The church that chooses the win-win approach is headed for positive and constructive results in a conflict.

Leaders' Response Styles to Resolving Conflict

Every leader is at liberty to develop a response style to conflict, and whatever style a leader uses impacts how the leader resolves each conflict. Leaders may choose from some alternatives as they exercise that leadership within conflict. They may choose to ignore the controversy, stay a distance from the controversy by not getting involved, pretend to deal with conflict but avoid real involvement, manipulate the issue to serve the leader's goals, discredit the opposition, suppress the conflict by wielding power and authority, and deal with the issue redemptively.

The first six alternatives are counterproductive. For the Christian leader, dealing with the issue redemptively should be the only alternative. The way to do this is to admit a conflict exists, clarify the issues involved, gather adequate and relevant facts, analyze the issue, work to eliminate disruptive factors, and arrive at a constructive, redemptive conclusion (Patterson 85).

The Mediation Model for Resolving Intragroup Church Conflict

As noted earlier, intragroup conflict refers to conflict between different existing factions in a group. The nature of this conflict primarily requires the mediation resolution process. In other words, a third party needs to help two parties resolve their dispute by themselves. This mediation resolution process, for intragroup church conflict is in accordance with the biblical mandate to be mediators. For example, Romans 14:19 says, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.” Christians are called to be peace makers by being mediators like their Master and the Chief Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Subsequently, the mediation resolution process provides numerous benefits, such as preventing exploitation, providing flexibility, reducing costs, facilitating understanding and maintaining dignity. However, I want to note that the mediation process is a voluntary process that will only work with the cooperation of all parties. In other words, disputants use mediation because they want to, not because they have to. Commitment to the process by disputants is essential for mediation to produce positive and lasting results, regardless of the training and skill of the mediator.

Providing a model for intragroup church conflict mediation resolution process, Augsburger submits four principles: (1) focusing on interests, not positions (2) separating people from the problem (3) inventing options for mutual gain, and (4) insisting on using objective criteria (207). Although these principles look quite Western in nature, they will be helpful in the Liberian conflict. To have all of the parties in a conflict reach an agreement, that is, collaboration, mediators should fully discuss the needs of disputants and find solutions that address each of their concerns.

Detailed explanation of the above principles produce the following: First, by considering the interests of the disputants, the mediator may open means of conversations between the disputants that may soften their positions. Disputants may have more in common with the other's interests than with their position. Second, mediators must work on the problem, rather than on the people espousing it. This principle allows mediators to be soft on people and hard on problems. Third, in inventing options, mediators should construct solutions that will enable all parties to win something. Fourth, mediators should not take a power position and then bargain from it. Instead, mediators should treat everyone equally and objectively so that a just result is produced (Schmalenberger 43).

Augsburger has a fine model of conflict resolution that differs slightly from the general framework of the mediation process of intragroup conflict resolution. The mediation process of intragroup conflict ranges from understanding dispute resolution and mediation, laying the ground work for effective mediation, conducting mediation, and reaching a settlement (McCullough 185) to pre-mediation (getting the parties into mediation), the mediation itself (resolving the conflict), and post mediation (securing a durable agreement; Poirer 213). The above mediation steps attempt to help disputants reconcile. Hence, the mediator should help disputants "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to be angry" (Jas. 1:19).

Dudley Week's eight steps to conflict resolution are important to list here because they incorporate the concept of an effective mediation resolution process for an intragroup conflict. These steps are (1) creating an effective atmosphere, (2) clarifying perceptions, (3) focusing on individual and shared needs, (4) building shared positive power, (5) looking to the future and then learn from the past, (6) generating options, (7)

developing “doable” stepping stones to action, and (8) making mutual benefit agreements (70).

Lewis shares similar process principles with Weeks that are useful in conflict resolution:

1. Helping others feel better about themselves,
2. Striving for effective communication,
3. Examining and filter assumptions,
4. Identifying goals, finding what is wanted rather than judging why,
5. Identifying the primary issue rather than being a “solutioner,”
6. Developing alternatives for goal achievement rather than relying on the

common approach: “There is only one way, and it won’t work,” and

7. Institutionalizing conflict management processes (49-73).

Table 2.2 reflects the corresponding of Patterson’s approaches to conflict resolution and Augsburger’s responses to conflict.

Table 2.2. Comparison of Approaches and Responses of Conflict

Approaches	Responses
Lose/lose	Avoidance
Win/lose	Repression
Lose/win	Displacement
Lose/lose	Management
Win/win	Resolution
Lose/lose	Utilization

Research Methodology

Interviews are some of the most effective methods of conducting surveys (Wiersma and Jurs 186). They provide a face-to-face or telephone method that allows one to talk to people and get their opinions on different issues (Janvier 31). The interviews have advantages over the use of questionnaires, but they are time and effort consuming (Wiersma and Jurs 187). Interviews have three models. They are the unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview; and the structured interview (Wilkinson and Birmingham 44) this research employed the semi-structured interview. David Wilkinson and Peter Birmingham explain the nature of the semi-structured interview:

There is less flexibility with the semi-structured interview. The interviewer directs the interview more closely. More questions are predetermined than with the unstructured interview, though there is sufficient flexibility to allow the interviewee an opportunity to shape the flow of information. (45)

In the semi-structured interview, the interviewer is in a better position to control the interview as well as accomplish his or her objectives in the interview process.

The face-to-face interview and the telephone interview are two methods of approach in conducting interviews (Wiersma and Jurs 191). Some people argue that the telephone interview has advantages over the face-to-face interview. These people's arguments are based on the less cost and convenience that are associated with the telephone interview (192). However, I think the advantage of the telephone interview depends on the context. A face-to-face would be preferable in Liberia because of the culture. The Liberian context would be a natural setting for such interviews, because that is how problems have traditionally been solved

Furthermore, interview items can either be selected-response or open-ended.

Wilkinson and Birmingham observe that “open-ended questions encourage the interviewee to provide more information than do closed questions” (53). Whatever item the researcher uses, it should be stated clearly in complete question form (Wiersma and Jurs 187). The items should have consistent meaning across respondents (187).

The researcher should exercise great care in conducting the interviews. William Wiersma and Stephen Jurs state the importance of training the interviewers.

Training the interviewers is a necessity. When two or more interviewers are used, the consistency in conducting the interview must be checked. In any event, an interviewee’s responses should not be the function of the specific interviewer. (189)

Wiersma and Jurs stress the need for every interviewer to be trained because of the nature and process of conducting interviews.

George E. Janvier outlines the following steps to observe when conducting a face-to-face interview:

1. Establishing a brief personal rapport with the person being interviewed through greetings and explanation of the research task;
2. Not wasting people’s time with long interviews. An interview should last from twenty minutes to forty-five minutes rather than letting it drift into several hours. Doing the interview at the convenience of the interviewee;
3. Not using a tape recorder, such as a cassette without permission. People may be afraid to tell the truth on tape as they fear exposure or that the researcher will do something with the tape;

4. Not trying to write down every word the interviewee says, which wastes time and breaks the flow of the conversation;

5. Asking the question, listening attentively to the answer, and writing down a few key words the person says; writing up the response later, as soon as the interview is over; Not waiting until the next day to write the responses. As soon as the interview is over, getting the responses written down to avoid forgetting what the interviewee said;

6. Asking the questions in the same manner of every person without giving facial clues to the interviewees;

7. Not encouraging their answers into any particular direction; and,

8. Thanking the person for his or her time used in the oral interview (32).

Subsequently, when the interviewer is conducting the interview, Wiersma and Jurs say, “[t]he interview should be structured to obtain the necessary information efficiently in a friendly but businesslike atmosphere; if possible, there should be some accuracy checks on the responses” (189). Wiersma and Jurs identify “response effect of the interviewee, predispositions of the interviewee, and inconsistent or unfavorable procedures when conducting the interview” as potential sources of error when collecting interview data (190). The response effect of the interviewee is the difference between the actual response and the true response. The interviewee’s predisposition is to lack motivation to respond, feel threatened by the interview, or respond in a way perceived to put themselves in the best light (190). The inconsistent or unfavorable procedures when conducting the interview might be when an interview is too long and the location not convenient and comfortable (190).

Finally, a research instrument must be reliable. Therefore, the interview “should be pre-tested, and items revised, until they are satisfactory. Interviewers require practice until the interviews are consistent across and within interviewers (Wiersma and Jurs 189).

Conclusion

The Bible testifies to the reality of conflict with and among the people of God. Subsequently, the Bible shows us that conflict affects the Church and the individual Christian in a variety of ways. In view of this truth and challenge, the Church is called to be constructively engaged in conflict situations.

In the literature review of this research, I have considered the theology of conflict and reconciliation and the studies of conflict and reconciliation. The theology of conflict and reconciliation reminds the church of its mission as the agent of reconciliation in a broken world. In the face of contention, the church is expected to perform its role as peacemaker. Moreover, Christians are admonished to guard their unity in Christ and place the interests of others before their own in the spirit of humility. When Christians demonstrate this attitude, they will be able to decrease dissensions between themselves and others. The studies of conflict and reconciliation bring the Church’s attention to the understanding of conflict, the factors responsible for strife among us, the ways these discords develop, our past response to contention, and what our response to dissension should be.

I believe if the church will ponder the issues that have been addressed by this review, Christians will have better ways to handle conflict in their homes, communities, and churches. Also, if Christians approach conflict with a proactive and positive attitude, conflict will turn into opportunity. The purpose of this study allows the church to rethink

the issue of conflict based on the previous situation to the present and to learn from the past for the future.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study addressed the problem of intragroup church conflict within the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The controversy over the life-tenure of the Episcopal office has been a major disagreement. This contention led to the formation of a group of United Methodists who referred to themselves as concerned United Methodists and has refused to cooperate with the leadership of the bishop.

The purpose of this research was to identify and learn the causes of intragroup church conflict within the LAC/UMC over the life tenure episcopal conflict that occurred in the 1980s and thereby identify strategies that could be used to address current conflicts and conflicts that might arise in the future. Hence, the bishop-for-life controversy is a test case.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the scope of this study and provided the foundation for data collection.

Research Question 1

What were the causes of the past major conflict in the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Conflict emerges from a variety of causes. A person who has a fair understanding of what is actually responsible for a particular discord is in a better position to address the issue than one who is not. The rationale for this research question was to bring into focus the root causes of the contention in the conference, so that a relevant strategy could be found to address such issues in the present as well as the future. I used the semi-

structured interview protocol to provide participants with the opportunity to provide their input on the root causes of the dissension in the Liberia Annual Conference.

Research Question 2

How did this conflict develop over time?

Conflict is not static. This research question attempted to identify the dynamic of how the dissension in the conference developed from one stage to another. I employed semi-structured interview questions to solicit responses from participants on their views about the development of the discord.

Research Question 3

What strategies did people use to increase or decrease the conflict?

This research question was intended to point out the means by which members of the conference directly or indirectly handled the discord. I distributed to the ten participants semi-structured interview questions to sample their views on steps used either to increase or decrease the conflict.

Research Question 4

What strategies were available to resolve the conflict, whether biblical, cultural, or global in origin?

The intent of this research question was to consider the most appropriate or effective strategies that could be used to resolve current and future discord that might arise in the conference. I used semi-structured interview questions among participants to find effective strategies that could be used to resolve conflict in the conference.

Participants

The participants for this study were ten ordained elders of the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, who are either current or former pastors in the Conference. I selected the participants on the basis of diversity in age, gender, ministry position, education level, years of experience in pastoral ministry, ministry position, and effectiveness in pastoral ministry. These participants were drawn from those who supported the issue of life tenure as well as those who did not support the issue. This study made use of criterion-based sampling.

Design of the Study

This project was a descriptive study that utilized researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol. I used a researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol that consisted of eight open-ended questions to address the research questions of this study. Questions encouraged a narrative response by participants. This researcher-developed interview questions came out of a pretest interview protocol that I conducted with members of my Research Reflection Team. The procedures were as follows. The pretest interview questions, a pilot run, were based on the research questions, with each research question containing two questions each. I constructed the items on the interview questions to ensure accurate measurement of feelings and perceptions of the participants. I administered these questions to members of the RRT on a one-on-one basis at mutually convenient times and comfortable locations of members. The duration for this pretest was seven days and forty-five minutes for each member. After the interviews, I invited verbal feedback and impressions. The group identified confusing questions, ambiguity, grammatical errors, poorly prepared items, and their perceptions concerning the length of

the interview. With this input from my team, I revised and refined the interview questions and finalized them for actual administration.

Variables

The variable of this research study was conflict. I conducted a forty-five minute interview with each of the participants to come out with strategies for resolving intragroup church conflict in the LAC/UMC.

The interview items I used in the semi-structured interview protocol were clearly stated in complete question form (Wiersma and Jurs 187). These items had unambiguous terms and they were relevant to the participants (187). Also, the items were consistent in meaning across participants and gave the participants sufficient direction (187).

Reliability and Validity

I carefully formulated and developed interview questions that were relevant to the area of research. I pretested, or conducted a pilot run, of the interview survey twice among the RRT, with two weeks intervening. In other words, the validity for the instrumentation used in this study was established through the pilot. Furthermore, the two sets of results from the pilot run were correlated and the correlations derived were of respectable magnitude. Reliability was determined with intra-rater reliability analysis and test-retest analysis.

Data Collection

The nature of this research was criterion-based sampling; hence, I used the semi-structured interview protocol which served as the source of data collection. I set up criteria to select participants for the study, and when that was done I informed the participants, and they were ready for the process. I made ready researcher-designed semi-

structured open-ended questions that were pretested twice among the RRT, and subsequently were conducted among the ten participants. I allotted to each of the participants forty-five minutes of interview time. I received the immediate results from the interviews. I allowed two months from beginning to end of the data collection.

Data Analysis

The study is a qualitative research project that made use of the content analysis procedures. I recorded, transcribed, and assessed the data using textual analysis. Data from interviews were processed manually by means of a master sheet. Responses from the interviews were coded. I started with individual interview questions. Summaries were drawn and emerging themes noted. Data from the interviews were manually analyzed and findings were integrated during the writing of the research report.

Ethics

I utilized confidentiality and anonymity to protect the psychological well-being of the participants. I verbally informed the participants about the procedures, and that careful steps would be taken to insure confidentiality and anonymity on their responses to the interviews; I explained those steps to them. The participants freely gave their consent to participate in the study. I have protected the anonymity of the participants in this study because of the sensitive nature of the research. No names are included in this study. The documentation provided participants the opportunity to hide their identity. I referred to the participants only by their initials. No one had access to individual data or the names of the participants except me. Only I had access to the results, and once I concluded my research, the data was destroyed.

Summary

I described the research process involved in this study in Chapter 3. The research questions, purpose, methodology, participants, and data collection were considered. The instruments used for this research was interviews along with personal observation. The instrument was described, and I explained the process of collecting the data. After the discussion on issues related to reliability, validity, and ethics of the research, I described the analysis process. Chapter 4 presents the results.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is part of the general church, the United Methodist Church, which is governed by a general conference that meets every four years to discuss the growth and development of the denomination. The United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline* guides the structure of the LAC/UMC. The LAC/UMC operates from the local church level to the district, and then from the district level to the annual conference.

The local church is the primary level of a charge, consisting of one or more local churches. In the local church, the pastor is the chief administrative officer and works with the administrative council of the church. Further, the annual conference organizes groups of churches in a geographic area to form a district. A district is administered by a district superintendent (DS), an elder appointed by the bishop, usually for a six-year term. The DS oversees the ministry of the district's clergy and churches, provides spiritual and pastoral leadership, works with the bishop and others in the appointment of ordained ministers to serve the district churches, presides over meetings of the charge conference, and oversees programs within the district.

The annual conference, the formation of groups of districts in a geographic area, is the basic unit of the LAC/UMC. The bishop, who is the resident bishop, presides over the conference. The annual conference meets annually for its regular business session. An equal member of clergy members and lay members from the conference meet together to worship, celebrate the previous year's ministries, and set the course for the coming year.

The bishop announces the clergy appointments or assignments at the conclusion of the conference.

The processes of decision making in the LAC/UMC is channeled through the above structure. However, the bishop and his cabinet make major decisions for the conference, with the bishop having great influence over the decisions.

The issue of the life tenure of the Episcopal Office in the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (LAC/UMC) was one major conflict that brought disunity among members of the conference. This conflict, which took place in the 1980s, produced a public war of words that brought disrepute to the witness of the church in the society. The purpose of this research was to identify and learn the causes of intra-church conflict within the LAC/UMC over the life tenure episcopal conflict that occurred in the 1980s and thereby identify strategies that could be used to address current conflicts and conflicts that might arise in the future.

Profile of the Subjects

The population for the study consisted of ten ordained senior elders in full connection of the LAC/UMC who were very knowledgeable about, and had different stances regarding the strife over the life tenure of the office of bishop in the LAC/UMC. These clerics agreed to a forty-five minute interviews, each at different intervals. The demographics of these elders include education, gender, age, ministry position, and ministry experience.

On the educational level, three of the participants have doctoral degrees, two have master's degrees, two have bachelor's degrees, and three others have associate degrees. Of the ten respondents, one is a female while nine are males. The age of the respondents

ranged from 45 to 75. The subjects have served the LAC/UMC in different ministry positions such as seminary presidents, seminary professors, senior pastors, directors of evangelism, administrative assistants to bishops, deans of the bishop's cabinet, conference secretaries, Methodist University and Hospital chaplains, directors of communication, chairpersons, co chairpersons and secretaries of the conference Board of Ordained Ministry, district superintendents, directors of the Language Literacy programs, and directors of Council on Ministries. Ministry experience of the subjects, which was measured in years of service, especially full-time pastoral ministry, involved the minimum of twenty-nine years for each participant (see Appendix A).

Research Question 1

The first research question guiding this study was, "What were the causes of the first major conflict in the LAC/UMC?" The interview questions were designed to find out the general and specific causes of the bishop for life controversy in the LAC/UMC. From my observations, the respondents shared similar views with respect to the general and specific causes.

The failure to communicate adequately and interpret the new proposal for life tenure episcopacy of the 1984 West Africa Central Conference (WACC) to the people. This *dominant theme* was the recurring theme that came from all of the participants as to the general causes of the strife (see Appendix B). Both those who were in favor of life tenure episcopacy (up to age 65 or 67) and those who were against term tenure episcopacy (eight-year term) agreed that the decision to replace term tenure with life tenure was done abruptly with little or no education or interpretation to the people. In

1984, the Liberia Annual Conference learned that the WACC passed a resolution to allow the LAC to practice life term episcopacy (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 126).

The majority of the participants who did not state explicitly that the WACC passed a resolution to allow the LAC to practice life term episcopacy, revealed that the general cause of the conflict was the failure of adequate communication by the leadership to educate members of the conference on the issue of the life tenure resolution.

Participant A.A. states the problem the people had with the resolution:

When the late Bishop S. T. Nagbe was elected in 1965, after his two years of service, a proposal was made by the late C. Cecil Dennis, Sr. the Lay leader of the conference that a bishop should serve for life. Some of the ministers did not like that,... so it did not work. Then in the 1980s the proposal came back and some members of the conference had problem with it because they did not have education on it or educated to it.

Participant C. C. shares similar thoughts with Participant A .A. as to the cause of the conflict:

The idea of bishop for life is a good thing not only for the individual but for the church. Financially, it would be difficult for the church to cater or take care of the retirement or benefits of a retired bishop. When a life time is in place, the general church would be responsible for the care of the bishop during retirement. The problem was the failure on the part of the ruling authority at the time to educate the people on the dynamics of the church in terms of organization.

Subsequently, Participant F. F. concurs with the above views but goes a step beyond to show that even though the people were not cognizant of the structure of the general church, they were manipulated to go against the proposal:

The cause of the conflict was the lack of education. The people did not have the education about the global church; we were still on the traditional level which had to do with term tenure. Because the people did not have this education about the general church, they were misled in believing that *life tenure*[original emphasis] meant until death or forever.

In addition to the issue of lack of education about the proposal, Participant D. D. shares this view:

Lack of understanding or ignorance. Many people in the conference at the time did not know the structure of the church in terms of its connection to the central conference and the general conference. Hence, members were swayed to consider the issue from traditional level. They did not know the church structure in terms of what it was saying about *term* and *life* tenure of the episcopal office. Cultural influence. As the debate progresses, some members advance the cause that in the African context there is no term tenure, the chief is there for life. Displaced loyalty. People were loyal to the bishop at the time thus refused to be reasonable in putting the church first.

Participant B. B. named the lack of financial resources as one factor responsible for the dispute:

Since we could not support our church, if we allow tenure to continue, the question is where will we get the money to support our retired bishops? So, when the leaders sang the song that there was no money to support retired bishop,... we agreed upon life tenure, which was the beginning of our conflict.

One of the participants pointed out *ministry benefits* as a contributing factor. Participant G.G. comments how ministers were concerned about benefits when the issue came up.

When the conference grew, changes took place. There was growth. Hence, the matter of life-time episcopacy came about. It was not a conflict at the time but what made it conflict was that the clergy were looking into the future about what would this mean for their ministry in terms of benefit. Therefore, a division arose among the clergy which was the 'for and against.' When this took place the conflict started.

For his part, Participant I .I. focused on the context of the conflict as well as on documentation of the issue:

One reason for the conflict is the difference in the sociopolitical context in which the controversy arose and the one from which the West Africans were finding interpretation and resolution—that is between West Africa and the USA where the standard and practice of bishop for life was set.

Second reason, the records of the proceedings of the West African decisions are woefully inadequate to decide the issue. They did not focus on the specific issue in question since they did not consider the possibility of such controversy. Too much was taken for granted at that time.

Finally, Participant J. J. who was explicit about a resolution been passed at the WACC in 1984 on the practice of life tenure in the LAC pointed out this

The general causes of the conflict in the LAC/UMC can be traced to several factors. First, there was a discussion to conform to the episcopal pattern of the other conferences in the West African Central Conference and adopt the life term episcopacy (up to age 65 or 67) and abolish the term episcopacy (8-year term). A resolution to go through adopting life term episcopacy was passed in 1984 at the West Africa Central Conference. Also, it was unclear as to when exactly the resolution was to take effect. Many in the LAC/UMC believed it would take effect at the end of the existing leadership and whoever would be elected next would begin the life term episcopacy. The bishop at the time interpreted the resolution to mean life term episcopacy would begin effectively immediately during his episcopacy, making null and void the term episcopacy of 8 years. Without resolving this disagreement, the bishop remained in office. Second, when the secretary of the central conference was asked to produce the minutes of the conference session where the decision was reached, he conveniently misplaced and could not locate them, thus complicating the problem even more.

The lack of visionary leadership; predominance of African traditional

politics. This *secondary theme* surfaced in the data collected on the specific causes of the conflict in the LAC/UMC (see Appendix B). The participants interviewed named the lack of visionary leadership and African traditional politics as the specific causes of the dispute. The lack of visionary leadership is seen as a result of greed and power struggle while “the chief rules for life and is always right” is the practice of absolute authority among African chiefs. Participant A.A. states:

When the bishop for life discussion came out, some clergy members of the conference opposed it. They insisted on the bishop serving for four years

term instead of life term. These people were anxious to become bishop. They were greedy for the position.

Participant C. C. shares similar position with Participant A. A. According to him, self-interest/personal aggrandizement was the specific cause of the conflict:

The placing of personal interest above the interest of the church or the larger body. Leaders at the time argued for the election of a bishop for life because it would now be in their interest. They knew bishop for life was in the best interest of the LAC/UMC because the church was not going to be in the position to take care of her retired bishop in terms of salary and other retirement benefits, yet they opposed it when the issue was first announced because they were not at the top. Now that they were at the top they thought it was necessary for the church to accept the idea. But they have forgotten that they made the issue to look ugly. Few of these elders were Revs. J. Nimeju Kartwe, Mark J. Richarrds, Bennie D. Warner, Arthur F. Kulah [secretary for the group of senior elders who initially opposed the bishop for life issue]. When personal interest supersedes that of the group, there is complete chaos and break down.

Participant G. G. adds to the lists:

After the dream of the life time episcopacy became a discussion, it became personal. People were concerned about themselves. People [clergy] in the upper bracket of ministry decided to ask, "Where will I be when someone in the same age range of mine and who is in leadership time is over?" So, people whose age was towards retirement did not like it. While ministers who had age on their side and those who were very close to retirement were in favor of life time episcopacy. People felt their personal interest was at stake, hence fought to protect it. Even people who spoke against life tenure from the onset of the discussion were now arguing for it because they were in authority.

Participant B.B. concurs with the other participants when he says, "At that time the qualified people were fighting for the leadership so they could enjoy the privileges of a bishop. They had their personal interest at work." Also, Participant F.F. refers to selfishness and tribalism as the specific cause of the conflict:

The specific cause was based on selfish motive, which was reflected in tribal line or ethnicity. When the bishop for life was proposed, Bishop Kulah was already bishop and had stayed there for many years. Many

people did not like this because of the *country man* versus the *congo man* mentality that have already divided the Liberian society.

The participants agreed that the conference members did not have thorough education on the new proposal. Couple with this lack of understanding, personal interest, ethnicity, documentation and ambiguity contributed to the problem.

Participant D .D. talked about leadership and education as some of the specific causes of the dispute:

Lack of well-defined leadership.... It was not clear as to the kind of leadership operation at the time. Principle and systemic leadership was lacking. Anything that looked fine was accepted. Little education.... Many ministers were not trained at the time to understand the issue. People wanted a bishop but did not know what kind of bishop.

For Participant E.E., lack of satisfaction and cooperation are two factors that are responsible for the specific causes of the conflict:

The lack of satisfaction over the decision that was reached at the seat of the conference in favor of life time episcopacy and the lack of cooperation, people against life tenure refused to work with those in favor of life tenure, are the causes.

Participant I.I. refers to the causes of the conflict:

Because of nonspecific recorded facts addressing the 1970s issue of bishop for life, the 1980s debate and controversy centered on what people recalled to memory from the 1970s. They did not remember the same facts and interpret in the same way what was intended. They did not provide adequately for future researchers to analyze and evaluate the facts and draw objective conclusions.

Participant J. J. submits this view about the specific causes of the conflict:

The specific causes of the problem included the refusal of the incumbent bishop to sit down and have a meeting with those who opposed the switch without clarity, specifically the concerned Methodists. The concerned Methodists took the matter to the Justice Ministry and that they did not help. There were public wars of words between the two sides and the conference membership was divided along ethnic lines. Another specific

cause was that the general conference, the GBGM, and the Worldwide UMC did not handle the conflict prudently. They sent, I believe, the Sierra Leoneans, who many saw as supporting the bishop of the Liberian UMC.

Research Question 2

Every conflict has a timeline. The second research question, “How did this conflict develop over time?” was geared towards establishing factors that may have been responsible for the development of the discord. The interview questions intended to probe the date of the dispute, the most convenient time to have stopped the dispute, and the description of the various stages of the strife.

The life tenure episcopacy controversy that has its root in 1965 became a conflict in 1984 but could have been resolved immediately. This issue was the *dominant* answer to Research Question 2. An equal number of participants referred to the time of the contention as having been in the 1960s or 1980s (see Appendix B). Those who argued for the 1960s based their reason on the past appearance of the issue of life tenure episcopacy while those who argued for the 1980s based theirs on the immediate happenings of the dispute. A smaller number of the participants synthesized the two views. For example, Rev. I. I. said, “[T]echnically, the potential for conflict started in the 1960s when the first Liberian Bishop was elected. What was potential became real in the 1980s.” Subsequently, eight participants recommended the immediate resolution of the conflict whether it was in the 1960s or 1980s.

Here are the views of participants who said the conflict started in the 1960s and could have been resolved immediately: “It started when the LAC/UMC requested for an autonomous status. That is, 1965 was the starting point, when the first indigenous bishop

Stephen Trowen Nagbe was elected....and it could have been stopped immediately.”

(Participant C. C.) Participant F. F. concurs with Participant C.C.:

I think the conflict started in 1965 during the reign of Bishop S. T. Nagbe. I think when Bishop Nagbe was elected, President William V. S. Tubman was involved and supported him. There were certain people who thought certain people should be bishop. For example, the late Rev Dr. Bolton Williams of Cape Palmas and the late Rev.Dr. S. R .E. Dixon of First Church Monrovia were thought of as persons who should have been bishop. Therefore, bitterness grew when they did not become and this bitterness filtered down to the eighties. Again, another *country man*, Bishop Kulah, was a bishop. I think 1965 should have been the time to stop the bitterness that had developed in the conference over *country man* versus *congo man*. Although this would have been difficult because this mentality was embedded in the Liberian culture.

Other participants, such as participant D.D., were not specific:

It started during Bishop Nagbe’s time. The issue was just a discussion and was not a conflict. Bishop Nagbe did not oppose the discussion and during his time the office of the bishop was term tenure [eight years]. The general feeling at the time was suspicion. Ministers at the higher level were suspected of wanting to be bishop, even though it was not clear. The few educated ministers saw the lower ministers as threat. There was not open debate but this was the foundational point. The most convenient time would have been the end of Bishop Bennie D. Warner’s administration but it was interrupted by the first coup d’état in the Republic of Liberia.

While Participant E.E. narrates his perspective on the issue:

I think it started in the 60s when S.T. Nagbe became bishop. Nagbe was pastor at Mount Scott UMC and every eye was on Rev. Dr. Bolton Williams who was close to President Tubman, and President Tubman had confidence in. When the time came, Tubman asked the outgoing Missionary Bishop Prince Taylor who he could leave in charge. And Taylor said Nagbe. So Tubman accepted and at the election in Cape Palmas Nagbe won. Here animosity started. ‘Why should Kru man become bishop? Ethnicity started too. Then Warner a Bassa man wanted to be and Kulah a Kpelle man wanted to be. The issue was not resolved immediately. They thought life time was not proper. The most convenient time should have been the Nagbe’s time because it injected ill-feeling among the people.

The participants named leadership problem and lack of satisfaction as some specific issues that contributed to the crisis. Also, they believe the conflict was in the 1980s with root in the 1960s, and the opportunity to solve it was lost.

Two of the participants bridged the 1960s and 1980s as they talked about the time line of the conflict. Participant A.A. points out that 1968 and 1980 are the two connected years:

It started from 1968. The proposal for life time was rejected. Now, when Kulah took office in the 1980s as bishop, he brought that proposal for life time back. The best time to have stopped this conflict would have been in the same year, to reeducate members of the conference. But this was not done instead. It was done secretly and not openly.

Participant I.I. speaks in the same direction on the 1960s and 1980s dates.

Technically, the potential for conflict started in the 1960s when the first Liberian Bishop was elected. What was potential became real in the 1980s when those who thought Bishop Kulah had been elected for term should allow election of a successor. The matter became even more complex when put in the context of the West African Conference.

Participants opting for the 1980s as the immediate context of the conflict and when it could have been resolved shared the following views. Participant B. B. says, “The conflict started at the time of Bishop Kulah in the eighties. The good time to have stop it was when it started, but the people refused to do so.” Participant G.G. expresses his view in this fashion:

It really started in the 80s but had its root before the 80s. There were dreams of the episcopacy and elders in the upper brackets were against the life time proposal. Even the bishop under whose administration the conflict arose also opposed it when it was been discussed in the early years. Furthermore, when we established the central conference, and when it became mandatory that we have unify tenure either life time or term, Bishop Kulah who was then bishop supported life time. His colleagues

refused him because he spoke against life time when he was not a bishop. The best time would have been when the conflict started.

Participant H. H. for her part states succinctly that the trouble in the conference started when the conference was constraint to find a new bishop.

With the first bishop out of the way, the next bishop was brought in who was B.D.W., ... Then the 1980s disaster struck and the bishop had to flee for his life. At this point our problem continued. This then plunged the LAC/UMC into a campaign for another bishop who had indirect interest for life time tenure this became a problem in the conference.

Participant J.J. closed on the issue when states:

I believe this conflict began in 1984 with the unclear resolution of the Central Conference to ratify the Liberia decision to move from the term episcopacy to the life time episcopacy. The question was, when was the term episcopacy to begin? Was it upon the adoption of the resolution or was it at the end of the incumbent bishop's term? The time to end this conflict should have been in 1985.

Personal aggrandizement, poor documentation, lack of clarity, and settling for the *status quo* became stages in the conflict over life tenure episcopacy. These issues were the *secondary themes* resulting from Research Question 2. When asked to describe the various stages of the conflict, the participants' responses reflected the above theme (see Appendix B). Accordingly, half of the participants saw personal aggrandizement as one of the stages in the dispute. The participants shared that some of the leaders handled the issue of life tenure the way they did because of self gain. Subsequently, they added that class system or ethnic lines played a vital role in the conflict. A smaller number of participants pointed to the issue of documentation as another level of the discord.

Participant B.B., describing personal interest, says: "People took it from different angles. It was closed group discussion and then it became open group discussion."

Participant E. E. added, “[G]roups held secret discussion which became gradual and then became open to the public or larger body.” Participant G. G. shares similar view:

It came about after the establishment of the WACC with the tenure of the Episcopal office, and people begin to speculate as to the good and bad sides of the proposal. The elders who had the potential of becoming bishop rejected it. Then it went into group discussion in the corners. When words came from the council of bishops, it was when it came to the full front and became a fight, a concern. At this time some people said it was not good to fight because it would tarnish the reputation of the church. Some people did not understand what life time was. The educated misled the uneducated as to what life time was. They told the uneducated life time meant to die in office. An advice given to the bishop at the time which was not accepted was to allow the LAC stand against life time so that it could go into a vote between the LAC and the Sierra Leone Annual Conference, and the winner would carry the day, and it would not look like it was the incumbent bishop fighting for life time. But in the meeting, some so-called wise elders said no to that suggestion, that we should go according to the Sierra Leone Annual Conference.

Participant D. D. described three stages in the conflict: “The issue was first conversational during Bishop Nagbe’s time and later it was further conversational during Bishop Warner’s time. The turning point came during Bishop Kulah’s time when it became magnified for the whole church to see.” Participant F. F. speaks about class system:

First, our people who joined the United Methodist Church were the same people in the Liberia Society that practiced the *country man* versus *congo man* ideas. These ideas were strongly embedded among the people. This idea was passed down from generation to generation. The *congo man* said the *country man* could not be anything, and the *country man* said to the *congo man* he could be something. So, we can say this mentality started with the history of Liberia when it was founded. Secondly, this mentality came into the church and affected it. Some people thought because of their background, the leadership of the church was their personal property. That is, they held church leadership like their personal thing.

Participant C. C. shares this position:

Many elders, especially those in full connection were opposed to life tenure so they influenced others to oppose it and made the bishop for life issue ridiculous. The process itself was rejected by some thus the coming of the first concerned Methodist group in the conference.

From the explanations of the participants, covert discussion, overt discussion, tribal line are among other things that served as stages for the dispute.

Participant I. I. explains the issue of documentation as one of the stages in the conflict:

Stage one was the failure to clearly establish and document for history whether or not the Liberia Annual Conference was adapting bishop for life. Stage two was the failure to take the question of bishop for life when the West Africa Central Conference was established, making it possible for the West African bishops to rotate. If such had been done, Kulah, having served two terms of eight years would have been assigned to Nigeria or Sierra Leone or another West African Country anticipating the growth and expansion of the West African Central Conference.

Participant A. A. explains his view this way:

What I saw was an unchristian approach to the issue. It was done like we were in a political club. The group supporting the incumbent bishop on the life tenure was the same group taken to Freetown to discuss the issue. When they returned the message was in support of the incumbent bishop.

Research Question 3

The third research question guiding this study was, “What strategies did people use to increase or decrease the conflict?” The interview questions requested participants to share ways in which members of the conference contributed to the increase as well as the decrease of the conflict.

The conflict escalated due to narrow perception, the use of negative tactics, and the assumption of the values of African traditional politics. This *dominant theme*

emerged as participants responded to the ways members increased the contention. All participants reported that members of the conference contributed one way or the other to the escalation of the conflict. Members took sides in the dispute and brought in a class system. The conflict divided the conference into two major classes: The *congo people* (Americo-Liberian descendants of freed American slaves) and the *country people* (Indigenous/native Liberians). For instance, the leader of the opposing group was a congo person and the bishop was a country person. Some people took sides along these lines. Participant F. F. shares his experience of what he believes to be the contributing factor to the crisis in the conference:

I cannot say anything during the Nagbe's reign because I was not active or involved in the church. During the Warner's reign I observed decisions to affect the life of the church were made from either First United Methodist Church with M. Deshield, C. C. Dennis, Sr. and others, or Cape Palmas. These people made impact on the conference even though they were not the bishop. They were the so-called *congo people*. Decisions that were made in the church sought their support. On the other hand, the *country people* because of their status in the society, could not make decision in the church. This was the attitude that was exhibited during the conflict. Bishop Kulah, who is a *country man*, was opposed indirectly because he is a *country man*. So, we had people taking sides and this made our problem grave.

Participant J. J. adds, [M]embers of the conference contributed to this conflict by taking sides and not calling for a meeting of minds and spirits to resolve the issues."

Furthermore, some of the participants, such as participant A. A. had these views about the escalation of the conflict:

Members of the conference were hauling and pulling because they did not clearly understand the issue. Some were for and against, and the leadership at the time mandated local churches in the conference to deny the leadership of the 'Concerned Methodist Group' the Holy Communion and this was done.

Participant E.E. describes how both sides contributed to the increase of the strife:

The concerned Methodist sent leaflets to the various districts in the conference attacking Bishop Kulah. Of course, people who were against life time supported Bush and people who were in favor of life time supported Bishop Kulah. For example, the late Rev. David Tweh Toe, former DS, encouraged Bishop Kulah to fight back.

Participant H. H. for her part says, [B]y letting their political ambition take pre-eminence over God's work: rebellion, selfishness, what about me, lack of spiritual insight and support, disunity, and lack of divine intuition, and impiety contributed to the problem."

Some who opposed life tenure were falsely accused and misjudged by the incumbent leadership due to guilt by association. For example, those who chose either to reexamine the facts surrounding the bishop-for-life issue or who held opposing views on the matter were marked, without investigation, as opposition, disloyal, and striving to undermine and unseat the incumbent bishop. Participant D. D. describes some of the behaviors of the conference members during the crisis:

Misjudgments. People falsely accused others and passed wrong judgments on them. Those who were opposed to life time episcopacy were considered enemies of the bishop. When you were objective about the issue, you were branded as concerned Methodist. People had all kinds of unchristian behavior manifested. You had lies about taking vote on the issue at the time.

When one is condemned before trial in the United Methodist Church, it is considered unfair (*Book of Discipline* 750-52), and in this situation it raised doubt as to the truthfulness of the accusation.

Others chose to be silent because of connection to the leadership at the time, or intimidation by the leadership, with respect to ministerial appointment. Participant B. B. states, “[P]eople sided with the bishop at the time because of personal support and condemned others who spoke out against life time.” Participant G. G. comments that some of the people were passive during the conflict because of various reasons:

Since it was church related, members’ contribution was mostly silence, especially those who were against life tenure. Some were not against but did not understand the issue so they were silent. Relationship was another thing. People supported life tenure because of relationship or connection to the bishop.

Revenge, misjudgments, and passiveness characterized the escalation of the dispute.

Also, the participants reported a lack of frankness to speak out against the process of implementing the bishop-for-life. Participant C. C. comments, “[M]embers of the conference increase the conflict by not protesting against the wrong that was imposed on them.” Similarly, members of the conference failed to widen their understanding of the issue. Instead, they focused on the post-colonialism African practice of chieftaincy and tribal affiliation—another way in which the conflict intensified. Participant I. I. affirms the practice of colonial African tradition chieftaincy among members of the conference:

By not broadening their perception of the problem. Thoughts were too narrowly focused on the old African traditional practice of chieftaincy, tribalism, and parochialism. If we had widened the vision to the whole of West Africa, we would have maximized the space for all and rate of growth and development instead of conflict in one small country because ambitious and progressive ones felt limited and excluded.

The lack of vision among some of the conference members was responsible for the crisis in the church.

Two main traditional political systems are used in Africa, namely, the kings or chiefs and ruling councils of elders (Dickson 70). Other systems include societies with

headmen, emperors, or priests. The goal of each of these political systems is to enable individuals, families, clans, and tribes to attain goals that ensure the welfare of all. Chiefs or councils of elders are at the head of the community as a whole (70). Chiefs are highly respected in the community according to Kwesi A. Dickson:

In many African societies the chief still has certain primacy on ritual occasions because he is a sacred person, sitting as he does on the stool that symbolizes the ancestors. Usually it is male who become chiefs, though women play an important political role in more than one way. (70-71)

In addition, Dickson contrasts pre-colonial African tradition and post-colonial African tradition rules:

Those who govern have the responsibility of establishing and maintaining stability in their societies. In carrying out his duties the chief is expected to isolate himself from the rest of the society; he is to make himself available to all. Contrary to the impression which has been created following the tendency for certain African leaders of today to claim to model their rule and policies on traditional patterns when their authoritarian rule could be given a much less flattering explanation, a traditional African does not brook dictatorial rule. (71)

Dickson's submission argues that before colonialism, African traditional chiefs were responsible to ensure the security of their people, this included listening to them.

According to Michael A. Rynkiewicz, no chief can lead without followers, and followers can always pick up and follow another leader, so it was incumbent on chiefs to develop good relations with followers as the base of their support. Until colonial times when the administration put a hat and a badge on chiefs and chiefs were free to become despots because colonial guns backed them up. Further, Dickson points out that "a society in which there were extremes in terms of what its members had of the good things of life would be considered abnormal" (71).

Rynkiewicz affirms that there are differences between traditional rulers before and after colonialism. Accordingly, he argues that “despotic chieftaincy” came only because of colonialism, that chiefs had to be responsive or the people would replace him with another chief. Colonial administration took the balance out of the hands of the people (362). The colonial model of chieftaincy includes the following assumptions: (1) Chiefs are always right in making decisions among their people, and (2) chiefs remain in office for life.

Few efforts were made towards the reduction of the contention. This *secondary theme* surfaced when participants responded to the interview question about how to decrease the conflict (see Appendix B). Participants commented that those who were against, as well as for, the life tenure of episcopacy did not meaningfully try to decrease the discord. They did little or nothing. According to some, no attempt was made at settling the dispute, yet others said that if an attempt was made, it was passive. Participant A. A. doubts if something was done to decrease the conflict. According to him, “I am not sure as to whether anything was done by members of the conference to decrease the strife.” Participant B. B. shares a similar view. He says, “I am not aware of any attempt made to decrease the contention. In fact, there was no way to know. No idea! If they did then I did not know.” Participant H. H. expressed her difficulty in answering the question. She comments, “This question is hard for me to answer because what people said they were doing to decrease the problem was actually increasing it.”

Participant D. D. named resignation as one way the conflict was decreased:

Resignation. The issue was brought up in one of the conference sessions where people were asked to put their hands up if they were in favor of life

tenure and vice versa. From this so-called process some people resigned from the conflict and other activities.

Subsequently, Participant C. C. states, “some people made suggestions by speaking out though they were not listened to.” Participant F. F. adds: “Bishop Kulah set up two committees to study the issue of term tenure and life tenure. This was done for two years. People were involved in the decision-making and this decreased the conflict or bitterness.” Participant I. I. says when members consulted the *Book of Discipline* on the issue instead of African politics, they found some help for the situation. He comments: “Simply by looking outside of the West Africa region to the UM *Book of Discipline* which allows for mandatory retirement at age 70.” The UM *Book of Discipline* is the law book of the church, which governs its structure and operation.

At the same time, some said an Executive Committee was set up by the bishop to look into the strife. Participant G.G. states:

In every group there are wise people. A formation of the Executive Committee came into being. They were responsible for discussing the issue. It was from this group that a resolution was brought forward for the settlement of the conflict. This committee was a composition of elders from the clergy and the lay people from local churches. The committee was the middle group.

Another participant said that older members helped in the decrease of the conflict.

Participant I. I. explains, “There were some older members (both clergy and laity) who remained in prayer and counseled both sides to reduce the tension.”

Most of the participants agreed that resignation, the organizing of an executive committee, counseling, and prayer help in the reduction of the strife.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question sought what strategies were at the disposal of members of the conference in resolving the conflict: “What strategies were available to resolve the conflict, whether biblical, cultural or global in origins?” The interview questions posed to the participants sought to identify the steps that were used to resolve the dispute and the personal experience of the participants in conflict resolution as well as their suggestion as to whether the strategies that were used in bringing the conflict to an end or other strategies would have been the best.

Haphazard means were employed to manage the strife instead of using dialogue, reconciliation, and common ground, which have demonstrated success in settling other conflicts. This *dominant theme* was derived from the participants’ responses as to how the discord was handled (see Appendix B). Most of the respondents, such as Participant I. I., said that the dispute was never resolved:

The conflict has not been resolved. It has to be revisited in the context of the West Africa Central Conference, deciding how we can work together across national boundaries and difference languishes to allow West Africa bishop to rotate in the whole region and not be an imposition on one conference. In that way they still follow the USA and other with bishop for life or mandatory retirement at 70 whichever comes first.

Participant I. I. in his judgment believes a life tenure that is rotational in the WACC would prevent problems surrounding the issue of life term.

According to the respondents, the leaders denied conflict, yet people were intimidated as ministerial appointments were made according to who supported life tenure for the bishop and who did not. Participant C.C. comments on the strategy that the leadership made:

First, the top people in leadership denied that there was a conflict. So, we can say because they chose to deny the reality of the conflict they did not have any strategies. But technically, we can say there was a negative strategy because people were been accused for the wrong thing and there

was chaos over the place. The first concerned Methodists spoke out and said the election of the bishop for life was not credible.

Speaking about intimidation, Participant D.D. explains how it was done: “The leadership used the strategy of intimidation in the conflict to put down ministers who opposed life time position. Therefore, ministers were afraid to speak out so as to avoid not been appointed and recognized.”

The leaders’ use of denial, false accusation, and intimidation were strategies that did not help solve the conflict.

An executive committee was set up as a means to end the strife. This committee partially succeeded in its authority to mediate in the conflict because of the direct control the incumbent bishop had over the committee. Participant G. G. comments, “We used the Executive Committee as a strategy in resolving the conflict. Although they were part of the conflict, they knew the effects the conflict would produce so they tried to be careful.” At the conference, a slogan was widely developed, claiming that there was “no money to care for retired bishops.” When the issue of life tenure came up in the 1980s, the conference was reminded that the LAC/UMC was not financially able to pay benefits to all retired bishops because the term tenure would create room for more retired bishops. But, the general church would be responsible to give retired bishops benefits if the life tenure was accepted. Therefore, whenever life tenure was talked about, the saying was, “there was no money to pay retired bishops.” For example, Participant B.B. gives this view:

I do not really have knowledge about the strategy used at the time. However, I remembered once that the means that was used to quiet down things was the 'saying that we do not have money to support our retired bishop, hence we should agree on 'life time....' And this was the end on the issue.

The executive committee and the conference's inability to care for retired bishop did not do much in resolving the crisis because they had shortcomings.

In addition, the outcome of the WACC favored the incumbent bishop, hence cooling off the dissension. Participant A. A. says, "When the LAC took the conference to Freetown, and the result was given, things became calmed because it was in favor of the person who they wanted." Subsequently, in sharing their experiences in conflict resolution, the participants opted for knowing the cause of the problem and finding solution, investigating the issues well, having a free flow of communication and avoiding settling score. Participant G. G. shares his experience and suggestions on how to resolve conflict:

The way I have solved conflict is to know the problem and its cause, and find solution to it. Also, know that conflict will have two sides-negative and positive. Face the reality. With these, I try to be constructive in the conflict.

Participant C. C. states, "The way I have successfully resolved conflict in my ministry is by employing dialogue, consultation and openness." Participant B. B. explains, "Call in the disputing parties. Find out the root causes. From the explanation show the right way." Participants believe that identifying the problem, finding solution to the problem through dialogue are helpful ways in conflict situation.

Furthermore, Participant A. A. shares his experience in resolving conflict: "This is what I know. A leader should be slow to talk and not every talk is right. When a leader

gets information he should call the person who is involved with the information. He should not fight back.” Participant G. G. shares his strategy:

Conflict embitters the minds of the disputants, that is why they avoid speaking to each other. My approach has been to call the people involved and ask for the problem and sit and discuss it with the people openly. As a leader of a church, country, tribe, etc. you are not one person but chairperson too. Hence, you have to listen to the grievances of your people.

Participant E.E. shares his experience of resolving conflict:

When conflict came my way, I did not fight back against the other party. I pray and went to my opponent for talk and try to reconcile the issue. I avoid keeping speech from the opponent so I can win he or she over.

Finally, Participant F. F. says, “I learned to stay firm in what I believe because I am the one who will answer whatever concern. I believe people should be educated and hold firm to what they do and say.”

Participants E. E. and F. F. have different emphases when it comes to resolving conflict. E. E. emphasized reconciliation and avoid fighting back while F. F. placed emphasis on firmness in conflict situation.

Dialogue, a committee of trustworthy elders (clergy and laity) and application of scriptural principles could have been used because they settle disagreements effectively and peacefully. This *secondary theme* emerged after participants gave what they considered best strategies for resolving the conflict (see Appendix B). They stated that setting up the Executive Committee was a brilliant strategy but fell short of achieving its mandate because of the influence of the bishop over the

group. Participant G. G. states the shortcoming of one of the strategies that the leadership used in the conflict:

The formation and implementation of the Executive Committee was a unique strategy because in the village and our cultures, there are wise people who we can use to settle dispute, although members of the committee were a part to the conflict. The bishop was involved with the committee.

Further, this conflict situation would have included respect for individual, planning, collaborating, consulting, and cooperating within the West Africa Region.

Participant D. D. explains, “We should recognize the importance of people and appreciate every member of the conference inspite of their level of education. Listen to the people if they were talking foolishness. Discern the truth to know it, and ask where are we going?”

Participant C. C. comments, “The strategies would be to implore consultation, seminar, and conference, where there will be dialogue, willingness, and frankness with the issue.

These will be effective.” Adding to the list, Participant A. A. states, “as Christians, whatsoever plan should not be hidden. It should be made known so as to gather more facts and then implement. There should be open discussion where people can talk freely.”

For his part, Participant E. E. submits what he considers as the most appropriate strategy:

The most appropriate one is to dialogue. This approach provides room for all to be heard. If you want to resolve a conflict you have to involve the two parties and allow them to explain what the problem is and the reason(s) for the problem. As the go-between, do not leave out any of the parties involved. Let the two parties sit and resolve their problem.

Participants stressed the need for the respect of person, consultation, dialogue, and discernment in resolving conflict because they have proven to be effective ingredients.

Participant I. I. gives suggestion that the LAC could use in the future:

Thinking and planning collaboration and cooperation on the whole West Africa region. And the West Africa Central Conference could even aggressively expand itself by opening up other UM Conferences in other West African countries thus increasing opportunities for more than one rotation before retirement or death.

Similarly, participants said seminars and conferences could have been held in resolving the conflict peacefully. Seeking God's guidance through his Word and prayer could be embedded in the peace process. Participant F. F. states, "I think educating the people to the church is a good strategy. The people should be prepared or educated to enable them accept change. Let an educational process be put in place." Participant B. B. comments, "We must learn to pray and fast in conflict situation and give the situation to the Lord. Also, we should allow the Lord to select some trustworthy elders; I am talking about both clergy and laity, to settle our palaver." Participant H. H. submits biblical guide lines that the conference could use in conflict situation:

The only strategy that I know is sacrificial prayer, fasting, reading the Word of God and acting upon the instructions therein, and revival. We must put on the whole armor of God's truth found in the book of Ephesians 6, which is our mantle of mercy and grace.

Conflict has spiritual dimension, hence, it needs spiritual treatment.

Summary of Major Findings

From the data gathered, the following major findings emerged:

- The conflict on the *life tenure* of the episcopacy was never resolved.
- African traditional politics influenced the process of moving from term tenure to life tenure.
- The issue on the *bishop for life* was first discussed in the 1960s.

- The leaders communicated that the resolution to practice *life tenure* was passed at the WACC.
- A committee of trustworthy elders (laity and clergy) and the application of scriptural principles might be effective modes in settling intragroup church conflict.

In the following chapter, observation, implications, applications, and limitations of these findings are explored in greater detail.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Conflict is not new to the church. Biblical history testifies to the reality of conflict with and among the *laos* (the people of God). The early Church faced many different kinds of internal strife that they were able to address.

The purpose of this research was to identify and learn the causes of intra-church conflict within the LAC/UMC over the life tenure episcopal conflict that occurred in the 1980s and thereby identify strategies that could be used to address current conflicts and conflicts that might arise in the future. This chapter discusses the findings of the study.

The Unresolved Conflict over the “Life-Tenure of the Episcopal Office”

From the research findings, the majority of the participants implicitly or explicitly said that the conflict was not resolved. They argued that the incumbent leadership denied the existence of the conflict. Therefore, according to the participants, the leadership could not resolve the conflict because they did not recognize it as a conflict (see Appendix B). However, from the Episcopal address of the incumbent bishop, one could infer the presence of a conflict even if it was not admitted overtly. In the episcopal address, the bishop said the issue of life tenure was resolved:

In my Episcopal Address given at the 152nd session of the Annual Conference held with A. D. Williams United Methodist Church in the city of Owens grove in 1985, I thanked the conference for the resolution which enabled the West Africa Central Conference to elect ... me for life. Thus, as far as the whole or majority of the members of the Annual Conference was concerned, the Life Term issued had been dealt with properly, democratically, and according to our Book of Discipline once and for all. (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 38)

The incumbent bishop in his episcopal address alluded to the presence of a conflict.

Subsequently, in this address, the incumbent leadership was referring to the two resolutions that were passed to make him bishop for life. In 1983, at the seat of the 150th session of the LAC, the conference took a vote in favor of life tenure and subsequently submitted that recommendation to the First Quadrennial Session of the WACC in 1984, which was passed in favor of life-time episcopacy. However, concerns were raised by the opposing side. A petition was sent to the WACC in 1988 during the Second Quadrennial, and a second resolution to confirm and reaffirm the incumbent bishop as bishop for life was passed (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 127).

One of the senior elders who opposed the incumbent bishop at that time disagreed with the statement of the incumbent that the issue was “dealt with properly and democratically”:

Where we could not agree is on the question of whether the 1984 Liberia Central Conference resolution advocating life time episcopacy was passed. The procedure came under critical scrutiny as it resembled the Old True Whig Party style of politics when it was asked, “All in favor of bishop for life stand up, practically everyone stood up. Someone moved that by acclamation we had adopted a resolution in favor of Bishop for life.” (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 92)

The senior elder’s statement questioned the procedure that was used by the LAC to adopt the bishop-for-life. According to him, the voting process resembled that of the country’s one party system in which a head count was taken instead of secret ballot vote. For him, this election was not democracy because it did not offer real freedom in the voting process.

The conflict was not resolved. Some of the disputants assumed that certain things were understood, hence, the issue was resolved. For instant, in his address, the incumbent considered the LAC’s adoption to practice life tenure, and the resolution passed at the

WACC since the WACC has the exclusive responsibility for the election of bishops as resolving the conflict of the bishop-for-life (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 126). The conflict was not resolved because of few factors. Generally, the two sides of the conflict, the bishop and the concerned Methodists, placed their personal interests over the interests of the church. When such attitude is demonstrated, tension arises. First, the conflict was not handled properly, and the incumbent bishop bears greater responsibility for this result because he could have done more in finding solution to the problem. The disputants, both the bishop and those concerned, never had the opportunity to find common ground. The bishop and those who supported his position opted for reconciliation on a superficial level, thus reaching concrete decisions between the two sides difficult on a peaceful settlement of the dispute. The bishop was under obligation to ensure genuine reconciliation, but if he created indirectly the atmosphere of fear, threat, lack of compromise, and did not excuse himself from the issue of life tenure, then achieving the much-needed reconciliation was more difficult.

Similarly, inasmuch as the bishop had this flaw, his attempt to organize an executive committee in an effort to find peaceful resolution to the crisis in the LAC must be acknowledged. The bishop was at fault, but the opposing side was at fault, too. They were unreasonable in their approach to the issue. If the bishop appointed two committees to study the issue of *term* and *life* tenures for two years, and if the LAC voted on life tenure and the WACC subsequently approved it, whatever dissatisfaction that the opposing side had, they could have attempted to find some peaceful alternatives in addressing the issue rather than a forceful approach. Still, the bishop might have demonstrated negative actions that gave rise to the conflict. As the leader of the church

and the Lord's anointed one, the opposing side could have opted for a peaceful and loving approach to the issue.

Secondly, other information revealed that the coming of the Liberian civil crisis in 1989 proved to be a bigger problem that had to be addressed first because people were turning to the church for hope, courage, comfort, and refuge. Perhaps, this dispute would have been resolved had it not been for the eruption of the civil war.

The bishop-for-life conflict in the LAC might have been resolved had the bishop approached it in the context of how the Belle tribe of Liberia deals with conflict situations. The Belle feel uncomfortable with the negative results of conflict. They believe negative results of conflict destroy the family; however, in the midst of conflict situations, they can be positive and hopeful because they see conflict as being solvable, no matter its nature. For this reason, the Belle describes it as "tongue and teeth are in the mouth yet they quarrel but you cannot throw them out." In resolving their conflict, the Belle expresses concerns for happenings and create an environment for peaceful discussion. In this environment, the disputing parties have the full opportunity to express themselves to each other openly, that is, sharing their feelings and hurts, after which time forgiven is demonstrated by the parties and a peaceful resolution is reached in the interest of all the parties.

Similarly, learning from Wesley's approach to resolving the conflict between him and Whitefield would have helped both parties to the bishop-for-life conflict, especially the bishop, in finding common ground. The history of the church reveals that Wesley was not immune to conflict but overcame the conflict with his dear friend Whitefield, on the basis of Christlike love. In the conflict with his friend, Wesley strived for fellowship,

genuine cooperation, and tolerance. He was careful to separate the issue from the person and sought the interest of his opponent. Wesley avoided trading personal attack against his opponent, revenge, or recompense. His goal was peace and reconciliation. He did not allow his supporters as well as the supporters of his opponent to exploit the situation or the dispute.

Subsequently, both parties to the bishop-for-life dispute could have resolved the conflict, if some of the following steps were taken, such as, facing the problem, guarding the unity of the body of Christ against human pride, involving the wider leadership of the whole church in resolving pressing issues and avoiding the opinion or view of one or two individuals, seeking consensus between disputants to make decisions in a conflict situation and avoiding the use of power to manipulate a conflict, looking out for the other person's interest in a conflict situation, hearing all sides of the dispute fairly before making decision, and treating each other fairly, accepting wrong done to them by their brothers and sisters in Christ and avoiding recompense, and exercising humility, gentleness, and patience in the conflict as well as flexibility, respect, and courage in their interaction with one another as they work through the conflict.

The conflict was not resolved but both the bishop and concerned Methodists were responsible for this.

The Process of Moving from Term Tenure to Life Tenure as Influenced by African Traditional Politics

The analysis of the data on the causes of the bishop-for-life controversy revealed by the informants is that African traditional politics influenced the process of moving

from term tenure to life tenure. In other words, the conflict was deeply embedded in the African world view about leadership.

Inasmuch as I do not disagree with the informants' views, this action was only a part of the whole that took place. The issue of life episcopacy and term episcopacy are the general practice or decision of the general United Methodist Church. However, both the leadership and those who opposed the leadership's position had African traditional politics at play.

The general conference of the United Methodist Church and the council of bishops of the United Methodist Church influenced the process of moving from term tenure to life tenure in the LAC. In 1980, the general conference granted an enabling act to the LAC for the creation of a WACC that would include Sierra Leone and Liberia, and later Nigeria. Subsequently, the council of bishops authorized the LAC and the Sierra Leone Annual Conference to form a uniform system. Sierra Leone Annual Conference's resident bishop was serving life tenure, which resembles post colonialism African traditional democratic structure, while the Liberia Annual Conference's resident bishop was serving eight years tenure (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 37). With this position, the pressure was on the LAC to move from term tenure to life tenure, which was the indirect wish of the resident bishop in Liberia.

In addition, African traditional politics influenced the process of moving from term tenure to life tenure. From oral tradition, African chiefs are highly respected by their subjects in the villages. The chiefs are considered people with great wisdoms and all powers are bestowed upon them in faith that they will lead their people aright. If the chief failed to govern his people well, that chief would be replaced. However, this reality has

been distorted since colonial rule; hence, nobody questions the authority of the chief, especially with respect to decision making and the term of office. This latter perspective of African traditional chieftaincy practice played into the issue of life term in the LAC.

Furthermore, many African leaders practice *despotic chieftaincy* in government and even in the church. African rulers who imposed their power end up being overthrown by more popular ones. The Republic of Liberia, on the coast of West Africa, suffered fourteen years of bloody civil war because of *despotic chieftaincy*. The pattern of *post-colonial chieftaincy* was followed when the decision to move the Liberia Annual Conference from term tenure to life tenure arose.

During the bishop-for-life crisis, the incumbent bishop, in his episcopal address to the annual conference, admitted that when the issue of life tenure came up in the sixties, it received opposition and did not take place, even though it was a legitimate concept that the general United Methodist Church had approved. One would wonder why an idea that was proposed in the sixties and rejected would be reintroduced and imposed in the eighties. Added to this concern, the majority of the informants pointed out indirectly as well as directly that the incumbent bishop, who was not in leadership at the time life tenure proposal was first put forward, was among those who opposed the life tenure issue in the sixties.

Answers to this question could be based on two reasons. First, the general political climates of the 60s and the 80s were different. The 60s was the pre-coup d'état period and the 80s the post-coup d'état period. The political climates, both in the church and state, may have had little influence on the issue, certainly, some kind of influence was involved. Secondly, the personalities and administration of the leaders involved

during these periods are responsible for what happened. In the 60s, Bishop Nagbe became the first Liberian indigenous bishop and the youngest bishop at the time. He was described as a humble and spiritual person who was opened to discussion and dialogue. When the issue of life time came up during his era, it was discussed although it did not pass. He had fewer trained ministers and the most of the few educated clergy who were in leadership positions at the time did not welcome *life time*. Interestingly, one would have thought that untrained ministers would have accepted the issue. Bishop Nagbe's main focus was on spiritual formation, evangelism, and leadership development.

In the 80s, Bishop Kulah was elected the third indigenous bishop. He was described as a humble and political person. He was open to discussion, too. During his era, the issue of *life time* was passed. He had many well-trained seminarians in the conference, unlike Nagbe. He was a member of the indigenous society and one of his emphases was the involvement of indigenous people in the total life of the church, especially with the sociopolitical situation in Liberia. This information, not conclusive, about the two leaders could account for why the issue of *life time* worked in the 1980s, but not the 1960s.

One might wonder why some members of the conference would oppose the issue of life tenure or have a problem with it when they knew it was a good idea for the conference and in their interest. There might be several reasons. The African traditional stratification in the form of age sets, titled men, etc., was distorted or taken advantage of by the leadership. In the African traditional setting, the people respect and honor their elders and titles. The incumbent leadership might have used age and position to get the people to accept life tenure because they were the elders and were in authority. The

question or concern of the leadership was not whether the people were actually ready for the life tenure decision but that they were to respect and obey the authority on whatever decision that was to be taken. Thus, the leadership exerted their influence directly as well as indirectly. Additionally, because the leadership had age and title in their possession, they unconsciously allowed little involvement of the people in the process.

Moreover, the leadership struggled with getting the full approval of the conference on the bishop-for-life issue because the people were confused about the chieftaincy mentality of life (rule until death) that had been developed after colonialism when compared with the church's life tenure (rule until retirement ages of 65 or 67). The people who now had a distorted view of traditional chieftaincy could not easily reconcile that with the church's definition of life tenure. As the leadership strived for life tenure, some of the people opposed and used it to get people on their side because of their hidden agenda and self-interest, while others followed reluctantly. The use of post-colonial African chieftaincy by the incumbent leadership influenced the turn from term tenure to life tenure.

The practice of post-colonial African chieftaincy by the incumbent leadership reflects the use of power. Power is essential to leadership. Without it, leaders cannot lead. Unfortunately, power and influence are not always used to help people. When the early Church was challenged to use power, the Church exercised it appropriately. Again, Acts 15 teaches the excellent way to demonstrate power.

The bishop as the leader of the conference had the power of authority to resolve the conflict in a Christ-honoring fashion. A meeting of minds and spirits could have been called and the atmospheres created to encourage parties to express their strife before the

body. During this meeting, fair hearing would have been given to all parties and the issue looked into with fairness. A right kind of decision in the interest of the people involved is then made. This kind of outcome would be made known to everybody, and the bishop would have exercised power and influence with grace and love and in a godly manner, like the leaders of the early Church.

The Issue on the Bishop-for-Life First Discussed in the 60s

The investigation of when the conflict started shows an equal number of participants referring to the time of the contention as being in the 1960s or 1980s (see Appendix B).

Although participants varied in dating the issue of the Bishop-for-Life a smaller number of the participants synchronized the two dates, the 1960s and the 1980s, as the starting point of the controversy. The synchronized dates fall in line with the historicity of the issue as reflected in the Episcopal address of the incumbent bishop.

The incumbent bishop revealed the following:

The issue of Life Tenure in the United Methodist Church of Liberia has a very long and interesting development. Since the coming across of the Methodist missionary to Liberia in 1833, and as a mission field of the Mother Church in America.... In 1965, the late Reverend Stephen Trowen Nagbe, Sr. was elected and consecrated the First Indigenous Liberian to head the church and conference as its Bishop under the new system. During the Episcopacy of Bishop Nagbe, the issue of Life-time Bishop was considered, but was met with some opposition. (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 36)

Unfortunately, the incumbent did not give names of those who opposed the bishop-for-life issue. Apparently, the issue of life tenure in the conference had been delicate and outstanding. Some participants stated that when the issue appeared in the 1960s it was just a discussion (see Appendix B), but the incumbent revealed it was not

only a discussion but was opposed when first mentioned (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 36). Subsequently, available findings establish that the conflict started in 1965, but it became known to the entire conference in 1984 when the resolution was passed by the WACC (see above). The 1960s and 1980s dates connected to the issue of the bishop-for-life explain to the LAC an issue that could have been handled with great caution and wisdom. Today, the LAC, still has the scar of division in its history.

**The Leaders' Communication That the Resolution to Practice Life Tenure
Instead of Term Passed at the WACC**

Some of the participants said that evidence did not exist as to the passing of the resolution on the life tenure. Others admitted the passing of a resolution to practice life tenure but were unclear as to when implementation took place. They argue that many people in the LAC/UMC believed it would have taken effect at the end of the existing leadership and a new leadership would have begun life term episcopacy. Also, they pointed out that when requested to do so, the secretary of the central conference was not able to produce the minutes of the conference when the decision was made.

However, the 1989 conference Journal of the LAC/UMC talked about two resolutions that were passed in favor of life tenure. Accordingly, in 1983, the LAC/UMC, through an election process, adopted the decision to practice life tenure. This decision was recommended to the WACC in 1984 and passed in that same year. At a subsequent time, when those opposing life tenure of the incumbent bishop submitted a petition to the WACC, their petition was denied on grounds that the resolution of 1984 was in order. Thus, the WACC reconfirmed and reaffirmed the incumbent bishop for life in 1988 (Official Journal of the LAC/UMC 37-38).

A close reading of the different positions or views shows the following: First, the participants who argued that no resolution passed on the life tenure denied the reality by confusing it with the procedure that the LAC/UMC employed to adopt life tenure. For them, the election procedure was a mockery over an important decision regarding the future of the LAC/UMC. These participants might have been saying implicitly that “something done improperly is not done at all.”

Second, those who agreed that the resolution on life tenure was passed were not clear about when the resolution was to take effect, whether immediately or in the future. They thought it was a future event since the incumbent bishop was already completing eight year term tenure. Making the situation difficult, the incumbent claimed that the decision had taken effect during his episcopacy, thus setting into motion the conflict.

Third, although a WACC resolution was passed regarding life tenure, neither the WACC nor the leadership of the LAC/UMC have really tried to solve the conflict resulting in the division of the body of Christ. The incumbent leadership might have down played the disagreement that developed.

The question as to whether the resolution to practice life tenure was passed by the WACC had to do with the issue of communication, which is one basic cause of conflict. The bishop and the opposing party would not have had a disagreement over whether the life tenure resolution was passed without a communication problem. Even though the conference journals made reference to the passing of the resolution for life tenure the conference does not have direct minutes available on the resolution. Hence, suspicion has been created as to the truthfulness of the claim by the leadership. Important decision such

as the life tenure resolution would be available for all members of the conference to see and peruse. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

The leaders of the early church in Acts 15 demonstrated the essence of documentation on important matters. When the conference reached a very important decision, they put into place the needed resources to communicate the decision to the rest of the church. The leaders made sure the decision reached was recorded because they were aware that good documentation does not allow for misinformation. The leaders had others communicate the message abroad. I believe if the leadership of the LAC had provided documents to establish the passing of the resolution on life tenure and its implementation, doubt would have been erased from the minds of the people who were asking questions about the resolution on life tenure.

In addition, when information is ambiguous and not properly disseminated, the communication process can have problems. The leadership interpretation of the ambiguity of the life tenure decision reached by the WACC was the basic cause of the conflict and the style employed in handling the dispute make it worse.

A Committee of Trustworthy Elders (Laity and Clergy)
and the Application of Scriptural Principles
as Possible Effective Modes in Settling Intragroup Church Conflict

The participants opted for the general ways of resolving conflict—finding common ground and dialogue (see Appendix B). In addition, they suggested a committee of trustworthy elders and the application of scriptural principles might be effective in settling intragroup church conflict. This position brings the world of the African and Scripture together. Unfortunately, the two sides to the conflict did not allow the world of

the Scripture and the African world to come together because they were engulfed or influenced by Western ideas of resolving conflict. In the African context the chiefs and elders are considered to be people with wisdom, hence, they are designated to handle conflicts. Such committees have proven effective in the African setting (see Chapter 2). Similarly, the Bible regards elders as people of wisdom who are given responsibility to settle issues within the community (Jas. 5:14). In Ephesians 6:11-13, Paul urged believers to prepare themselves for battle with the full armor of God. In other words, God has equipped us for spiritual battle; with his armor we are equipped to defend the church against satanic attacks and to lead persons out of darkness into God's light. In this text, especially in verse 17, Paul refers to the sword of the spirit as the Word of God. In form, the sword was approximately twenty to twenty-four inches long and was used in close battle, when the longer pikes could no longer be used. This weapon is the only offensive weapon with which Christians tear down satanic strongholds. Although Paul describes the sword as the "Word," his choice of "Word" raises a problem. Typically "Word" was used of a spoken word rather than a written word. Paul probably did not have in mind the Bible as a written record of the word of God, but the gospel as a verbal proclamation of the word which God has entrusted to the church (Crouch 37). In an effort to see the church move forward in being the light in the darkness, strategies were developed (see Appendix C) as a working tool to help resolve conflict effectively, peacefully, and without delay so as to avoid continuous reoccurrence of conflict in the church.

Summary of Suggested Strategies

Conflict varies from culture to culture. Conflict is also inevitable, hence all leaders face the challenge of overcoming it. People should not ask the question whether it will come

or not, but how will they handle it. From my study on intragroup church conflict in the LAC/UMC, the following strategies were developed to help leaders resolve conflict, especially intragroup church conflict. The goal of these strategies is to reconcile needs and interest. These strategies could be used interchangeably or separately. Here is a summary of the strategies I have developed from this study.

The Apostles' Model

This model emerged from the apostles' approach and desire in conflict resolution and is one form of biblical strategy. In this five steps strategy, the mediators create the awareness of the Lord's presence in the resolution process and allow disputants come face-to-face with the issue by listening to each other. The mediators will help disputants see what they have in common as well as their differences, and help them discuss without one party feeling superior over the other. When the disputants have reached satisfactory agreement, they celebrate a fellowship service of their unity in Christ.

The Paul-James' Model

This model is another form of biblical strategy in resolving intragroup church conflict. This model specifically emphasized the Paul-James approach to resolving conflict. In this model, the mediators will bring the disputants in the presence of God and help them to see their obligation in keeping the unity of the church against human pride and self-interest that divide the community, and encourage the disputants to focus on what they have in common such as the basis for their unity in Christ. Similarly, during the resolution process, the mediators will challenge the disputants to exercise humility, gentleness, and patience. In addition, during the discussion, the mediators will allow all

parties to the conflict to talk, with the view of considering the interest of the other person. The mediator will then come in by speaking the truth in love in resolving the issue.

The Palaver Hut Model

This strategy has a cultural orientation. Like the traditional African context of settling disputes, disputants and others will gather in a circle for the talk. Mediators will start the discussion with a challenge from the Word of God. After listening to the Word of God, mediators will ask their assistant to prepare the parties for the talk by sharing a local/traditional parables or proverbs that relate to conflict resolution. After the sharing, the mediators will ask disputants to explain their side of the conflict. When this sharing is done, mediators ask for recess to enable them critically to come up with a result that is constructive and redemptive in the interest of the disputants. The mediators will call in the parties after discussion and instruct the assistant to share another parable, which will follow the mediators' pronouncement of their findings to the disputants. The findings will be in the interest of the disputants. The mediators will close the talk by allowing the disputants to interact with each other peacefully, which will be followed by a prayer for peace and a fellowship meal.

The Peace-Building Model

Like the other models, this model will commence with invoking the presence of God in the discussion. Mediators will share on conflict and the ground rules for the process as they listen to the disputants without taking side. Mediators will make sure to have the discussion under control when it heat up, and allow the discussion to focus on the issue and not personalities. When mediators hear from the disputants, they share on forgiveness and the need to forgive one another in a conflict situation. The mediators will

seek exploration to produce a win-win result between the disputants as well as open future communication line for the disputants if they so desire. The mediators seek the Lord's blessings as the discussion closes.

Implications of the Study

This study provides some ground work for further research on resolving intragroup church conflict in the West African Central Conference. Also, the study opened the horizon of members in the West African Central Conference, particularly, the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Many people were not really well informed about the bishop-for-life controversy. Through this study, many things have been unearthed. Furthermore, this study may provide impetus for further investigation as to the reason(s) why life tenure was brought on the floor of the LAC/UMC in the 1980s and passed, when it had been opposed and not passed in the sixties.

Limitations of the Study

The bishop-for-life issue is a complex subject. When this issue comes up, people are afraid and feel uneasy to comment on it since it is an unresolved issue.

Although the expected number of participants for the study participated, the complexity of this subject made obtaining participants difficult. For instance, many participants who previously agreed to participate withdrew from the process, and they had to be replaced by others, some of whom also withdrew and were replaced. In addition, some of the conference journals that would have been very helpful to this study were destroyed during the civil crisis in Liberia.

This study included a criteria-based sampling dealing with selected clergy; hence, it did not provide opportunity for the laity of the conference to input on the controversy.

Unexpected Observations

Decades have passed since the conflict erupted in the 1980s with nobody venturing into the study of the dispute. Interestingly, major findings revealed the following:

- Many in the conference assumed that the conflict was resolved. However, from observation proves that the conflict still exists. To some extent, the conflict is having an impact on the current administration directly or indirectly.
- Many thought the conflict first arose in the 1980s, from the research investigation it has been manifested that the conflict first appeared in the 1960s. The seed was sown in the sixties, and it came to maturity in the eighties.
- The leaders communicated that the resolution to practice life tenure instead of term tenure was passed at the WACC. Furthermore, no one could give clarity on when said resolution was to be implemented, whether immediately or later. To make matters worse, documentation to show that the resolution was indeed passed is nonexistent.

Recommendations

This study generated a great deal of information that could be helpful to the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. In order to maximize the positive potential of the study, a number of recommendations may be appropriate.

- The first recommendation is that the issue of life tenure could be revisited in the context of the West Africa Central Conference for amendment.

- The second recommendation is that the LAC/UMC adopts one of the suggested strategies (the Apostle's Model, the Apostle Paul's Model, the Palaver Hut Model, or the Peace-building Model) in resolving intragroup church conflict in the conference (see Appendix C).

- The third recommendation is that a committee be set up to handle the affairs of intragroup church conflict resolution. The committee will be a warning network. This committee could be given a name that represents its function. It could be opened to both clergy and laity from age thirty and above. The committee would be comprised of ten persons, five clergy and five laity, and they would be expected to elect their officers. The bishop and lay leader of the conference would not appoint neither dismiss any member of the committee from their duties so that they would freely carryout their responsibilities objectively. Each member of the committee would serve for a maximum of four years. The bishop would be allowed to ensure that the committee work within the scope of their mandate and the UMC's policy. Members would be elected through blind ballots (names of candidates are written on pieces of papers that are folded, and five persons from the conference floor would pick the ten names out of the ballots). The names that appear would become members of the committee. The laity ballots would be separated from that of the clergy so as to have equal representation on the committee.

- The final recommendation would be to conduct trainers' seminars at the seat of every conference in conflict prevention or escalation, management and resolution in the church for pastors and members. These delegates to the conference would assume the task upon the completion of the seminars to conduct such seminars at their local

churches once a year. Reports must be brought back at the seat of the next conference for evaluation during the training of trainer seminar.

Conclusion

The completion of this study has not only been a fulfillment of my heartfelt desire to see that for the first time since the conflict took place in the 1960s, someone has taken the liberty to research the issue, but also to see the conflict resolved.

During the time of the study implementation, many members of the conference expressed a kind of anticipation and anxiety on the findings, saying that the subject was overdue, as it was set to help (according to them) chart the way forward and endeavor to bring unity to the church. The results of the study include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The incumbent bishop interpreted the decision to pass the bishop-for-life ruling as a sign of the absence of conflict over the issue when other explanations for the “unanimous” decision exist.
2. The church has no way of dealing with intragroup church conflict because the issue that started in the 1960s could not be resolved immediately or later.
3. The post-colonial African chieftaincy practice has been responsible for the way in which the conflict has been handled.

Postscript

This study has broadened my horizon on conflict in general and intragroup conflict in particular. When in a conflict situation, I learn to exercise humility, gentleness, and patience with the goal of achieving unity and peace with my opponent. Hence, I do not see disputants as enemies in a conflict situation but as people to whom I must show God’s love. As a Christian, I am to look not only to my own interest, but also to the interests of others.

I give God the glory for the opportunity to be able to come to this realization of being an agent of reconciliation.

APPENDIX A
RESPONDENTS' PROFILES

No.	Respondents	Education	Gender	Age Range	Ministry Position	Ministry Experience
1	Rev. AA	Associate Degree	M	70 – 80	District Superintendent	30 Years
2	Rev. BB	Associate Degree	M	70 – 80	District Superintendent	30 Years
3	Rev. CC	Doctoral Degree	M	60 – 70	Admin. Assist. to the Bishop	35 Years
4	Rev. DD	Doctoral Degree	M	60 – 70	Dean / Bishop Cabinet	35 Years
5	Rev. EE	Bachelor Degree	M	70 – 80	Admin. Assist. to the Bishop	30 Years
6	Rev. FF	Master's Degree	M	50 – 60	Seminary Professor	30 Years
7	Rev. GG	Associate Degree	M	60 – 70	Senior Pastor	35 Years
8	Rev. HH	Bachelor Degree	F	60 – 70	District Superintendent	30 Years
9	Rev. I I	Doctoral Degree	M	60 – 70	Seminary President	30 Years
10	Rev. JJ	Master's Degree	M	40 – 50	Seminary Professor	29 Years

APPENDIX B

RESPONDENTS' RESPONSES

QUESTION 1: WHAT DO YOU THINK WERE THE GENERAL CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT IN THE LAC/UMC?

THEME: The failure to communicate adequately and interpret the new proposal of the life tenure episcopacy of the 1984 WACC to the people.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	The information on the issue of bishop for life was not clearly revealed.
2	Rev. BB	Lack of financial resources to support our retired bishops implicitly allowed us to agree upon life-time.
3	Rev. CC	Failure to educate the people to the church structure.
4	Rev. DD	Lack of understanding or ignorance plus cultural influence and displaced loyalty.
5	Rev. EE	Our inability to financially care for retired bishops influenced our thinking towards life-tenure.
6	Rev. FF	Lack of education about the global church thus leading to misinformation.
7	Rev. GG	Concern over future benefit for ministry.
8	Rev. HH	Inner and outward power struggle for position, honor, self-centeredness, ambition and greed.
9	Rev. I I	Difference in the socio-political context of the controversy and inadequacy of the records of the proceedings of the West African decision.
10	Rev. JJ	Discussion on conformity to the Episcopal pattern practiced by other WACC members, unclarity as to when the resolution passed at the WACC in 1984 was to take effect and misplaced of document that claimed to have contained the decision on life-time.

QUESTION 2: WHAT DO YOU THINK WERE THE SPECIFIC CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT IN THE LAC/UMC?

THEME: The lack of visionary leadership; predominance of African traditional politics.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	Some clergy opposed the life tenure because they were anxious to become bishop. They were greedy for the office.
2	Rev. BB	Qualified people fought for the leadership so as to enjoy the privileges of a bishop. There was personal interest.
3	Rev. CC	The placing of personal interest above the interest of the church or larger body. The bishop at the time of the conflict was one time against life tenure but was now supporting the issue because it was now in his interest.
4	Rev. DD	Lack of well-defined leadership.
5	Rev. EE	Lack of satisfaction over the decision that was reached at the seat of the conference in favor of life tenure.
6	Rev. FF	Selfish motive based on tribal line or ethnicity.
7	Rev. GG	People were concerned about themselves when life tenure became a discussion. They felt their personal interest was at stake. People who spoke against life tenure from the onset of the discussion were now arguing for it because they were in authority.
8	Rev. HH	Respondent's answer not clear.
9	Rev. II	The lack of non-specific recorded facts addressing the 1970's issue of Bishop of life produce little solution to the crisis in the 1980's.
10	Rev. JJ	Refusal of the incumbent bishop to dialogue with those who opposed the switch without clarity and the failure of the General Conference, GBGM and the Worldwide UMC to handle the issue prudently.

QUESTION 3: WHEN DO YOU THINK THIS CONFLICT STARTED AND WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE MOST CONVENIENT TIME TO STOP THIS CONFLICT?

THEME: The life tenure episcopacy controversy which has its root in 1965 started in 1984 and could have been resolved immediately.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	It started from 1968 when the proposal was rejected and then resurfaced in the 80's by the incumbent bishop. This conflict should have been stopped in the same year.
2	Rev. BB	It started during the reign of Bishop Kulah and should have stopped immediately.
3	Rev. CC	It started in 1965 when the LAC/UMC requested autonomous status and it should have been stopped immediately.
4	Rev. DD	It started during Bishop Nagbe's time and it should have been stopped at the end of Bishop Bennie D. Warner's administration.
5	Rev. EE	I think it started in the 60's when S. T. Nagbe became bishop. The most convenient time should have been the Nagbe's time.
6	Rev. FF	I think it started in 1965 during the reign of Bishop S. T. Nagbe. 1965 should have been the time to stop the fight or bitterness among the people.
7	Rev. GG	It really started in the 80's but had its root before the 80's. The best time would have been when the conflict started.
8	Rev. HH	Respondent's answer not clear... Then the 1980 disaster struck and the bishop had to flee for his life at this point our problem continued.
9	Rev. II	Technically, the potential for conflict started in the 1960's when the first Liberian Bishop was elected. What was potential became real in the 1980's.
10	Rev. JJ	I believe this conflict began in 1984 with the unclear resolution of the Central Conference to ratify the Liberia decision for life time episcopacy. The time to end this dissension should have been in 1985.

QUESTION 4: WHAT WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WERE THE VARIOUS STAGES OF THIS CONFLICT?

THEME: Personal aggrandizement, lack of document and clarity, and status quo became stages for the life tenure episcopacy disagreement.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	The group supporting the incumbent bishop on life tenure was the same group taken to Freetown to discuss the issue. When they returned the message was in support of the incumbent bishop.
2	Rev. BB	People took it from different angles. It was closed group discussion then it became an open group discussion.
3	Rev. CC	Many clergy elders opposed the life tenure and influenced others to oppose it. The process itself was rejected by some thus the coming of the First “Concerned Methodist group.”
4	Rev. DD	The issue was first conversational during Bishop Nagbe’s time and later it was further conversational during Bishop Warner’s time. The turning point came during Bishop Kulah’s time when it became magnified for the whole church to see..
5	Rev. EE	Groups held secret discussion which became gradual and then became open to the public or larger body.
6	Rev. FF	The struggle between the “Congo man” and “Country man” in the Liberian society was brought in the church and manifested among members.
7	Rev. GG	First, people speculated as to the good and bad sides of the proposal when the issue came about. Then it went into group discussion in the corners and came to the full front of the conference and became a fight, a concern.
8	Rev. HH	Respondent’s answer not clear. The question of bishop for life came about, few speakers came to the lectern on the subject.
9	Rev. II	Failure to clearly establish and document for history whether or not the LAC was adapting bishop for life and failure to take the question of bishop for life when the WACC was established, making it possible for the West African Bishops to rotate.
10	Rev. JJ	No answer.

QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE THE WAYS MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTED TO THE INCREASE OF THE CONFLICT?

THEME: The discord escalated due to narrow perception, negative tactics and African traditional politics.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	There was hauling and pulling among members because they did not understand the issue. There was for and against, and mandate was given to churches by the authority to deny communion to the people who were against the life tenure.
2	Rev. BB	People sided with the Bishop at the time because of personal support and condemned others who spoke out against the life tenure.
3	Rev. CC	Failure to protest against the wrong that was imposed on them (the people). Lack of frankness. People don't have the guts to stand for the truth because they want to play it safe.
4	Rev. DD	Misjudgment, false accusation, wrong judgment against those who opposed the life tenure. And lies about taking vote on the issue at the time.
5	Rev. EE	The use of leaflets war by the opposing side and the war of words between the disputants.
6	Rev. FF	Decisions to affect the conference were made by the "Congo people" while the "Country people" were denied the opportunity to contribute to decision-making. This class system created bitterness.
7	Rev. GG	By being silence since it was church related, especially by those who opposed life tenure, and by being in favor of life tenure because of relationship and connection.
8	Rev. HH	Allowing selfish ambition to prevail against God's way.
9	Rev. II	Failure to broaden their perception of the problem.
10	Rev. JJ	Members contributed by taking sides in the dispute. Refusing to call a meeting of minds and spirits to resolve the issues.

**QUESTION 6: WHAT ARE THE WAYS MEMBERS OF THE
CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECREASE OF
THE CONFLICT?**

THEME: Little efforts were made towards the reduction of the contention.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	Not sure as to whether anything was done by members of the conference to decrease the strife.
2	Rev. BB	Not aware of any attempt made to decrease contention.
3	Rev. CC	Some people made suggestions by speaking out though they were not listened to.
4	Rev. DD	Resignation. People decided to let go the issue because of the wrong procedure taken in the voting processing on the issue.
5	Rev. EE	Mini-conferences were held after the annual conference to speak on the issue.
6	Rev. FF	People were given the opportunity to speak out as well as educated to the Book of Discipline. Two committees were set up to look into the proposal which was done for two years. It was debated. People were involved in the decision-making of life tenure.
7	Rev. GG	A formation of an Executive Committee to look into the issue was done. Resolution was brought forward by this group for the settlement of the conflict.
8	Rev. HH	Not sure because what people said they were doing to decrease problem was actually increasing it.
9	Rev. I I	Simply by looking outside of the West Africa region to the UM book of Discipline which allows for mandatory retirement at age 70.
10	Rev. JJ	There were some older members (both clergy and laity) who remained in prayer and counseled both sides to reduce the tension.

QUESTION 7: WHAT AVAILABLE STRATEGIES WERE USED TO SOLVE THIS CONFLICT? CAN YOU SHARE A PERSONAL STORY FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT SUCCESSFULLY IN YOUR MINISTRY?

THEME: Haphazard means were employed to manage the strife, instead of using dialogue, reconciliation, and common ground which have demonstrated success in settling other conflicts.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	When the conference was taken to Freetown, and the result was given things became cool because it was in the favor of the person who they wanted. I learned to be slow to talk, to investigate well when I received information and not to fight back.
2	Rev. BB	To convince the people that we should agree upon life tenure, we said there was no money to support our retired bishops. I will call in the disputing parties, find out the root causes and the explanation and show the right way.
3	Rev. CC	There was denial of the conflict by the top people in leadership. People were accused for the wrong thing and there was chaos. I will employ dialogue, consultation and openness.
4	Rev. DD	Intimidation of those who opposed the life tenure, so ministers were afraid of not been appointed and recognize. I learned to know the problem, the cause of the problem and find solution to the problem. Also, Know the truth because a conflict has two sides-positive and negative. Face the reality.
5	Rev. EE	The use of call meetings. The conference Lay Leader called meetings of the laity to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. It was an inclusive meeting. People attended and listened and solution was found. I learned not to fight back. I pray, went to the opponent for talk and try to reconcile the issue right on the table. I don't keep speech from the opponent so as to win the person over.
6	Rev. FF	People were allowed to express themselves without being condemned. People talk freely. I learned to stay firm in what I believe because I am able to defend it.
7	Rev. GG	The Executive Committee was the strategy used although they were part of the conflict. My approach is dialogue. To call the people involve and ask for the problem and sit and discuss it with the people openly.
8	Rev. HH	Respondent's answer not clear.
9	Rev. II	Conflict not yet resolved. It has to be revisited.
10	Rev. JJ	No answer.

QUESTION 8: WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE MOST APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES TO USE FOR THIS CONFLICT AND WHY?

THEME: Dialogue, a committee of trustworthy elders (clergy and laity) and application of scriptural principles would have been used because they settle disagreement effectively and peacefully.

No.	Respondents	Responses
1	Rev. AA	As Christians whatsoever plan should not be hidden. It should be made known so as to gather more facts and then implement. For me, there should be open discussion where people can talk freely.
2	Rev. BB	Pray and fast for the conflict and give it to God. The Lord will select some people who are trustworthy to resolve the issue.
3	Rev. CC	Use consultation, seminar, conference where there will be dialogue, willingness and frankness with the issue.
4	Rev. DD	Recognize the importance of every member of the conference in spite of their level of education. Appreciate them. Listen to the people even if they were talking foolishness, and discern the truth, where the truth is and where we are going?
5	Rev. EE	To dialogue. This provides room for all to be heard.
6	Rev. FF	I think educating the people to the church is a good strategy.
7	Rev. GG	The formation and implementation of the Executive Committee was a unique strategy.
8	Rev. HH	Use Ephesians 6.
9	Rev. II	Thinking and planning, collaboration and cooperation on the whole West Africa Region.
10	Rev. JJ	No answer.

APPENDIX C

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING INTRAGROUP CHURCH CONFLICT THROUGH LEADERSHIP IN THE LAC/UMC

This appendix contains the strategies that I have recommended as a result of this study.

The Apostles' Model

- Step 1:** Let the discussion begin with a short devotion.
- Step 2:** Understand what the issues are between the parties and allow them to hear each other.
- Step 3:** Draw a common ground and identify where there will be similarities and dissimilarities among disputants for resolving the issue. Encourage disputants to avoid thinking of each other as inferior.
- Step 4:** Let the discussion end with prayers.
- Step 5:** Organize a fellowship service where the parties could celebrate their unity in Christ with the congregation.

The Paul-James' Model

- Step 1:** Open the discussion with a short devotion.
- Step 2:** Let disputants understand that they are obligated to guide the unity of the church against human pride and encourage them to celebrate the basis for their unity.
- Step 3:** Let the disputants exercise humility, gentleness and patience during the discussion.
- Step 4:** Hear both sides of the disagreement.
- Step 5:** Define the problem specifically and repeat it to the disputants.
- Step 6:** If disputants are clergy persons they should be encouraged to not use the pulpit to come down on their opponents.

- Step 7:** Speak honestly but lovingly in resolving the issue. The truth should be spoken in love.
- Step 8:** Let the goal of the discussion be an interest-based approach, that is, let the disputants look out for the other person's interest.
- Step 9:** Let the discussion end in prayer.

The "Palaver Hut" Model

- Step 1:** Everyone will sit in a circle.
- Step 2:** Start discussion with a short devotion.
- Step 3:** Give parable(s) or proverb(s) about conflict.
- Step 4:** Allow disputing parties to explain.
- Step 5:** There should be a break, at this time committee members will identify the issues involved and work to eliminate disruptive factors so as to arrive at a constructive redemptive conclusion in the interest of both parties.
- Step 6:** The parties are then called in and a parable is given on forgiveness and the need to be reconciled. The results from the deliberation of the committee are then given to the disputing parties which will acknowledge that they have wronged each other and now seek to restore peace.
- Step 7:** The disputing parties shake hands and embrace each other and a prayer is said for peace. The assembly then celebrates the peace between the parties with a fellowship meal.

The Peace-Building Model

- Step 1:** Begin the session with a short devotion.
- Step 2:** Let disputants know that conflict is part of human nature and it is solvable.
- Step 3:** Make disputants aware of the ground rules.
- Step 4:** Maintain objectivity, avoid taking sides.

- Step 5:** Give a break when emotions heat up.
- Step 6:** Let the discussion concentrate on issues not personalities.
- Step 7:** Explain the importance of forgiveness and the need to forgive one another.
- Step 8:** Let the goal of the discussion be a win-win approach.
- Step 9:** Keep communication lines open for disputants if there is a need for future conversation (optional).
- Step 10:** End the session with prayer.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you think were the general causes of the conflict in the LAC/UMC?
2. What do you think were the specific causes of the conflict in the LAC/UMC?
3. When do you think this conflict started and what would have been the most convenient time to stop this conflict?
4. What could you describe as the various stages of this conflict?
5. What are the ways members of the conference contributed to the increase of the conflict?
6. What are the ways members of the conference contributed to the decrease of the conflict?
7. What available strategies were used to solve this conflict and can you share a personal story for resolving conflict successfully in your ministry.
8. What would have been the most appropriate strategies to use for this conflict and why?

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